

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

November 14, 1999

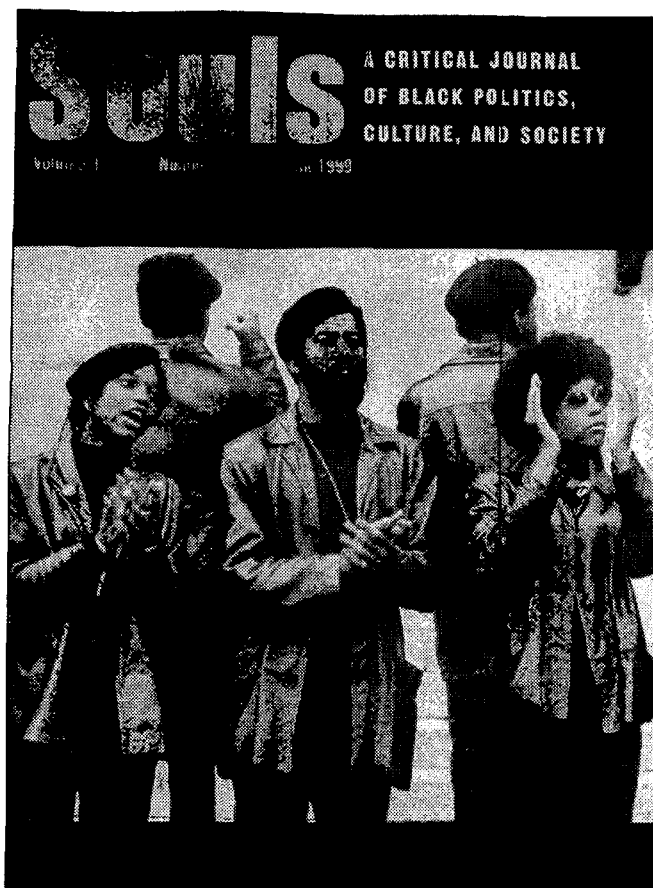


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# Souls

**Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society** is a quarterly interdisciplinary journal sponsored by the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University and published by Westview Press. The journal maps the intellectual contours of the contemporary black experience: the various ideological debates, politics, culture, and recent history of African American people. In the spirit of W.E.B. DuBois, **Souls** presents creative and challenging interpretations of the major themes and issues currently being discussed by scholars of black America.

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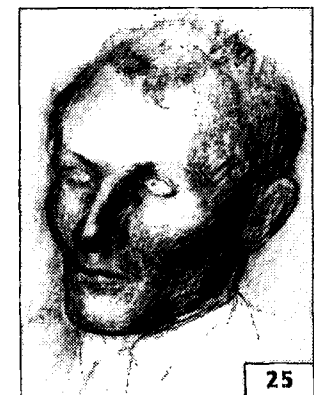
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## One and the Same

Isn't it a bit hypocritical for a magazine whose writers are being directly or indirectly bankrolled by liberal establishment foundations to be complaining about right-wing foundations bankrolling the voucher movement ("Keeping the Public in Schools," Oct. 3.)? Is there really any difference between the Treasury Department allowing George Soros' tax-exempt foundation money to be used to subsidize private dancing schools and allowing tax money to be used to subsidize the private schools that the children of both right-wing and left-wing middle-class people attend?

**Bob Feldman**  
New York

## Double Standards

I commend you for the publication of "The New Military Humanism" by Noam Chomsky (Sept. 19). According to President Clinton, as Chomsky cites him, the military action against Yugoslavia was necessary to stop ethnic cleansing. Additionally, he said, "The Albanian Kosovars would have become a people without a homeland, living in difficult conditions in some of the poorest countries in Europe."

How similar this description is to what happened to the Palestinians, beginning in 1948 and mercilessly intensified in 1967. It is something to think about that President Johnson and his successors were blind and could not see any ethnic cleansing taking place in Palestine. While our government head-

ed an international movement to guarantee the return of the Kosovars to their homes, we have not heard in 50 years one single word from our Congress or White House in support of the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland. What a gigantic double standard.

**Rene Espinosa**  
Falls Church, Va.

## Go Eugenics!

Salim Muwakkil always presents stark truths in his writings, and I'm often left dumbfounded that in these "modern" times, hidden (and not-so-hidden) racism is still the norm in society. I must, however, criticize his narrow view of the "crack sterilization" program that started in Los Angeles ("Cracked Logic," Sept. 19).

In another publication that reported on the program, a quote from CRACK (Children Requiring a Caring Kommunity) founder Barbara Harris struck me. She said, "Unless you are willing to take these kids into your home for 18 years, then your opinion doesn't matter to me."

With that said, I have to ask Muwakkil, is it OK to have 277 crack babies born? Is it even OK to have one born? It is not OK, and if keeping crack-addicted babies from being born into crack-infested homes and neighborhoods is being called eugenics, then go eugenics!

I think the historical connotation of the word "eugenics" is clouding the issue of the program's ironic life-saving



effectiveness. After all, some of the forms of "sterilization" are merely long-term birth control, like Norplant.

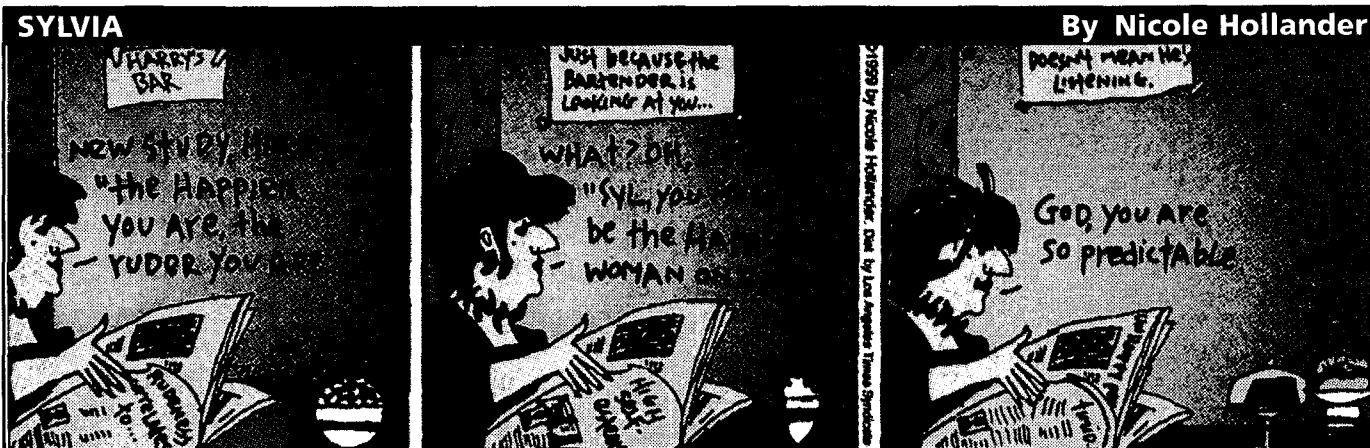
It's time for us to realize that some of society's problems (especially those created by our government, as many believe the crack epidemic was) are too big to be solved in the perfect, humanitarian way.

A crack-addicted woman has already made many bad choices on her own. Maybe helping her make one good choice isn't so bad after all. Your article grossly understates the power of addiction, and washes over the fundamental issue of reproductive choice for all women, even addicts who may make hasty decisions to get a fix.

Just how "bad" of a choice could it possibly be for drug addicts to choose not to breed?

**Donna Flores**  
Austin, Texas

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# One Step Forward

In September, Bill Bradley unveiled a plan to address the needs of the 45 million Americans who lack health insurance and are, as he puts it, in danger of being "economically ruined by catastrophic illness."

His plan would make health insurance available to almost all uninsured Americans through a combination of federal subsidies and tax credits. Under the proposal, Medicaid would be abolished and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, which provides insurance from a variety of private companies, would be made available to all Americans. The program would cost an estimated \$65 billion.

Bradley proposes that the federal government pay all or part of the insurance premiums (up to \$1,200) for uninsured children living in households with annual incomes under \$49,200 for a family of four. This would address the needs of 84 percent of the nation's 11 million uninsured kids. For adults, Bradley would have the government pay all or part of the premiums (up to \$1,800) of lower-income people surviving on less than \$32,800 for a family of four. Those whose income exceeds these guidelines would be permitted to deduct premium payments from their income and thus receive a tax break.

For his part, Democratic front-runner Al Gore has put forward a program that would expand the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to cover the nation's 11 million uninsured children. CHIP, a chronically ineffectual federal program, grants monies to states to provide health care coverage for children. Gore's plan would fail to deliver health care to the 34 million uninsured adults.

Bradley's proposal sets an important precedent: It makes the federal government responsible for ensuring that all Americans are able to get health insurance. Yes, it is an incremental reform. Yes, it still leaves the private insurance industry in charge of health care. But it is no small thing to those currently uninsured. "Good health is a blessing; not a right. But good health care is a right. And it is up to us to ensure that right to every American," says Bradley.

Bradley's plan is opposed by Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), which advocates a national health insurance system like Canada's. The group says this proposal is a sop to the insurance companies and HMOs, which would be entrusted with \$193 billion from Medicaid and \$65 billion in new expenditures. PNHP co-founders David Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler, whose work has appeared often in these pages, pointed out in a recent *USA Today* op-ed that in contrast to Bradley's plan, "national health insurance would give every American an insurance card, good at

any doctor or hospital." At the same time, they wrote, it would eliminate insurance company and HMO bureaucracy, thereby "saving the 15 cents of every premium dollar they take for profit and overhead." Indeed, if the universal coverage and single-payer features of the Canadian system were adopted in the United States, the money saved in administrative costs would pay for the insurance coverage of millions of Americans who are now uninsured.

Six years ago, *In These Times* editorialized vigorously against Clinton's proposed health care reform. Then, the debate within the Democratic Party was not whether health care coverage should be provided to all Americans, but how to do so. We advocated adoption of the Canadian system, realizing that as long as the corporate insurance industry defined the relations

**"Good health care is a right. And it is up to us to ensure that right to every American," Bill Bradley says.**

between patients and doctors, their decisions would always put profits first.

Polls show most Americans would support a national health insurance program that provides universal care and takes the insurance industry out of health care. It would be ideal if there were a Democratic candidate out on the campaign trail championing national health insurance. But until there is, Bradley's proposal is the only game in town.

Joel Bleifuss

## Can We Thank You?

As part of the celebration of our 23rd anniversary, we would like permission to thank the thousands of you whose contributions have sustained us over the years by including your names in our forthcoming anniversary issue. If you are a donor to the magazine and would like us to include your name, please send a brief note to publisher Beth Schulman by Nov. 3. (*In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60647.)

Anniversary gifts, if you choose to include them, will support our Appeal to Reason campaign to widen the circle of *In These Times* readers. If you are not yet a donor but want to join the family, please seize the moment!



# Safety Dance

By Jim Young

**A** Gore's lackluster presidential campaign received a sorely needed jolt when the AFL-CIO endorsed him in October. But the vice president's handlers are still working overtime to punch up his image. Particularly problematic is one of Gore's signature issues, the vaunted "reinventing government" program, which may be putting the nation's workers at greater risk of injury, illness and even death.

According to a report released in September by Public Citizen's Health Research Group, for the past seven years Gore's reinvention program has resulted in dramatically reduced enforcement of workplace safety and health laws. Under Clinton and Gore, the number of annual Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspections has been the lowest since Richard Nixon created the agency in 1970. At the same time, the percentage of serious, willful and repeat violations that are downgraded or dismissed has never been higher.

Gore's pet project, first recommended in 1993 by the National Performance Review (now called the National Partnership for Reinventing Government), called for a variety of business-friendly, cost-cutting policy

changes at OSHA. These included building "partnerships between regulators and business" and penalty-reduction plans—up to 100 percent—for employers who quickly fix problems.

Public Citizen researcher Peter Lurie, one of the report's authors, says the message from the vice president's program was to "go slow" on regulatory enforcement efforts. "My strong suspicion," he says, "is that since the Clinton administration came to power because of huge corporate contributions, it was payback time."

OSHA officials have a different view about the impact of reinvention. Charles N. Jeffress, assistant secretary of labor for OSHA, stated in a written response to the study that job injury, illness and fatality rates are all down and "enforcement remains strong." He said "significant cases," those resulting in penalties of \$100,000 or more, are up 187 percent since 1993 and penalty rates per inspection are higher under the Clinton administration than any other since the establishment of OSHA.

Statistics, however, do not tell the whole story. "In the midst of a Congress that was out for blood," says Eric Frumin, director of health and safety for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial

and Textile Employees (UNITE), "reinvention took its toll by cutting back on plain enforcement."

OSHA developed a "targeted" inspection program to complement inspections conducted in response to complaints. The program is based on injury and illness reports made by workers. But Frumin says it overlooks dangerous workplaces, particularly garment industry sweatshops. Why? Because workers in these shops are often too scared to lodge complaints about work that is numbingly repetitive and potentially crippling. And because employers have a strong incentive to discourage reporting if it results in an inspection.

As an example of another change at OSHA, Frumin points to the agency's Web site, which offers no easy-to-find information about workers' rights. "OSHA and You" is about OSHA and you, the small business owner. Workers are not their major 'customer' anymore," he says, using Gore's terminology. "Their customer is business."

Though many safety experts agree that enforcement has suffered, they note that recent business-backed attacks on OSHA are not reflected in Public Citizen's report. Since 1994, politicians such as Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-N.C.) have waged a sustained effort to pull the agency's funding, curb standard-setting and implement voluntary compliance programs. Nancy Lessin, coordinator of 25 union-based safety and health coalitions around the country, says OSHA went through "a near death experience that really weakened the agency." But Lessin adds, "It was Gore's reinvention team that came up with the philosophy of 'cooperation, not enforcement.' It is a vision that assumes companies are doing a good job and that OSHA doesn't need to be the cop on the beat anymore."

It remains to be seen whether Gore will be held accountable in the coming presidential campaign for OSHA's sinking enforcement record. But many union safety activists think he should be, noting that the reinvented OSHA's clearest message is about cutting red tape, not preventing hazardous conditions. ■

Jim Young is a labor writer in New Jersey.

Terry LaBan





# California's Judgment Day

By Hans Johnson

**A**mong religious conservatives, a "pagan" conspiracy bent on a "takeover of the United States" is standard shorthand for liberal political opponents. But in California, a leading anti-gay group is aiming these and other hostile charges at its own ally in the campaign to ban same-sex marriage: the Mormon Church.

California's political and religious landscape is riddled with fault lines. But few remain as potentially explosive as the fissure between the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) and the anti-gay group Jeremiah Films—a Hemet, Calif., company whose videos depict Mormons as blood-thirsty and cult-like. An eruption of the rift between the two groups—which five years ago undercut a drive to pass an anti-gay measure in Idaho—could further fracture California religious conservatives, still regrouping from several recent political defeats.

Hard-right stalwarts were dismayed last fall as several key legislators lost their seats and Matt Fong's GOP Senate bid fizzled after reports of campaign gifts to anti-gay crusader Lou Sheldon. Many hoped to regain credibility as an electoral force with a ballot measure banning same-sex marriage, set for March 7.

The LDS and Jeremiah Films have found common cause in the drive to pass the measure, called the Definition of Marriage Initiative. Sponsored by Republican state Sen. William "Pete" Knight, it would bar legal recognition of gay and lesbian couples in California by limiting marriage to "a man and a woman." According to state government reports, through June the measure's backers had raised four times as much money as gay rights supporters.

Helping to fill the coffers of the anti-gay campaign are a series of solicitations

by LDS leaders to the church's 740,000 members in California. A May missive from three church officials asked every Mormon household in the state "to do all you can by donating your means and time to assure a successful vote" on the ballot measure. Church members consider the letter to be a divine instruction since it was issued by church President Gordon B. Hinckley, whom Mormons regard as a living prophet. The proclamation was read aloud during church services across the state.

The church's move is not its first foray into anti-gay politics. In 1998, LDS officials contributed \$1.1 million to campaigns to amend the constitutions of Hawaii and Alaska, where court rulings

*Examiner.* "So we're talking about something we consider sacred."

But lofty rhetoric like Higham's wears thin with openly gay San Francisco City Supervisor Mark Leno. He alleges that campaign fundraising by the Mormon Church violates a condition of its tax-exempt status, which forbids nonprofit groups like churches from endorsing candidates or dedicating what tax laws call "substantial" resources to a political campaign. Leno later persuaded the city's entire board of supervisors to urge an IRS investigation of the large LDS donations.

Such an inquiry has precedent. In a case that sent ripples through the ranks of religious conservatives, the Christian Coalition lost its limited tax exemption in June following a series of complaints that it had engaged in partisan electioneering. Belying assurances from founder Pat Robertson that it hasn't caused "a single hiccup in our organization," the denial triggered a massive reorganization

of Christian Coalition activities and has fueled speculation that the group's political clout is waning.

Despite such cautionary tales, LDS officials are not backing down. At the 169th annual gathering of LDS leaders in Salt Lake City in October, Hinckley told the assembly, "For men to marry men, or women to marry women, is a moral wrong," adding that the issue has "nothing to do with civil rights."

Yet in their resolve to block gay marriage, LDS leaders are marching straight into the arms of their enemies. Even with four

Mormon members of Congress, California is a hotbed of anti-Mormonism, a loose network of activists who peddle conspiracy theories about the sect dating back to the 1830s. Anti-Mormonism is particularly prevalent on the Christian right, where belief that Mormonism is a heresy feeds a cottage industry of publishing and propaganda.

The leading producer of such materials is Jeremiah Films, whose titles include such anti-Mormon flicks as *The God Makers*. According to promotional material, the videos are an "exposé" of



promised to strike down restrictions on same-sex marriage. In Alaska, Mormon donations accounted for 79 percent of the funds for the anti-gay campaign, according to the *San Francisco Examiner*.

In the California press, church officials have repeatedly justified their aggressive fundraising as an extension of their ministry. "When we talk about traditional marriage—that is, marriage between a man and a woman—we are talking about one of the core beliefs of our faith," Merrill Higham, a church spokesman in the Bay Area told the



the "polygamy," "blood atonement" and "murder" that manifest the "pagan nature" of LDS religious practices, which purportedly include plans for an "endtimes takeover of the United States."

Jeremiah Films is also the country's largest producer of anti-gay organizing videos, some containing promotional trailers for their anti-Mormon merchandise. Religious conservative groups have used the videos as an offensive weapon to promote anti-gay ballot measures. This was the case in 1994, when the Idaho Citizens Alliance, sponsors of an anti-gay measure there, circulated the video *Gay Rights, Special Rights* to small groups of conservative activists throughout the state.

Press reports revealing that Jeremiah Films also made anti-Mormon materials set off an intense, eleventh-hour backlash against the initiative by LDS leaders and rank-and-file church members, who comprise about one-third of the state's electorate. The measure was narrowly defeated.

The California initiative may face a similar fate. Mormons' contempt for Jeremiah Films could sink the LDS's anti-gay liaison with Christian conservatives. Perhaps most nettling for Mormon leaders is Lou Sheldon's Anaheim-based Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), an ally in the fight against same-sex marriage whose Web site drums up business for Jeremiah Films by touting its wares.

Still, unlike Idaho, California seldom sees its statewide tallies swung by Mormon voters, who constitute just a sliver of the Golden State electorate. But as Sheldon inadvertently showed in last fall's Fong for Senate fiasco, left coast voters get queasy when a once-palatable ballot option gives off the whiff of intolerance. In March, Sheldon and Jeremiah Films may once again prove skunks at conservatives' picnic table, spoiling the religious right's hopes for an electoral revival.

To keep the California coalition from collapsing, LDS officials seem

poised to invoke religious bigotry to deflect charges of a foul partnership. Presidential candidate and Mormon Orrin Hatch tried out the argument on a campaign swing through San Francisco. Hatch denounced calls for an inquiry into LDS fundraising as "bigoted and prejudiced as anything could be."

Yet the heftier threat to "the spirit of tolerance," as the Anti-Defamation League noted in denouncing *The God Makers*, comes from Mormon-haters themselves. For a religious minority mindful of its past, the risks of giving quarter to intolerance and looking hypocritical may not warrant forging ahead on the measure. If so, its approval will be in jeopardy. And the strange bedfellows in California's crusade against gay marriage will awake to mutual recriminations. ■

*Hans Johnson writes about religion and politics from Washington, where he is assistant editor of Academe magazine.*



# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

## Presidential Cover-up 7.5

Commercial artists electronically remove inconvenient celebrity wrinkles from fashion spreads; Stalin used to have Trotsky erased from revolutionary paintings. Teachers at a number of schools in Muscogee County, Ga., have continued the tradition. Carefully going through more than 2,000 copies of a fifth-grade American history textbook, the teachers touched up a reproduction of the famous painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware so that students wouldn't get the wrong idea about what was draped across the president's thigh. The offending item is supposed to be the President's pocket watch—but teachers feared that dirty-minded youngsters would think that Washington was showing his little cherry tree to the world. "I know what it is and I know what it is supposed to be," the school superintendent told *The Associated Press*. "But I also know fifth-grade students and how they might react to it."

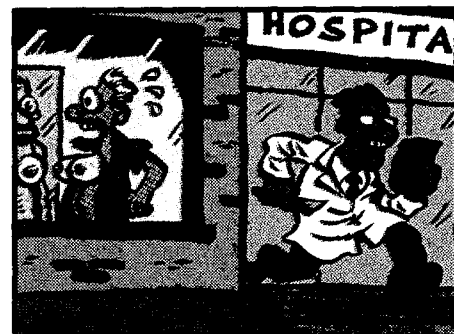
## Like a Surgeon 8.4

The quest for a perfect body led several Miami residents into the unskilled hands of a doctor with less-than-perfect credentials—actually, none at all. Though Reinaldo Silvestre, had his offices in trendy Miami Beach, he wasn't quite as classy as he must have appeared to his trusting patients. One male patient expecting pectoral implants woke up after his operation to discover that the doctor had gone a slightly different route. "He ended up with female breast implants," a police spokesman told Reuters. A videotape of the would-be doctor operating on one patient—later given to police—showed Silvestre jamming implants in the man's chest with, as the police put it, "a spatula-type thing you'd see in a kitchen." The patient, apparently dosed with Ketamine, an animal tranquilizer strangely popular among the all-night party crowd, actually woke up several times during the operation and was told to go back to sleep. Silvestre cleared himself and his spatula

out of the office before police could catch up with him.

## Make it Quick 9.5

If you're going to torture someone, make sure you kill them; that makes it OK. At least that seemed to be the line of argument being pursued by a lawyer representing former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in extradition hearings. Faced with allegations that Pinochet had tortured a man with high-voltage electric shock, *Newsweek* reports, attorney Clive Nicholls defended his client by pointing out that the man had actually died in the process. "Instantaneous death does not amount to torture," he explained.



TERRY LABAN

# Surf's Up

By Amanda B. Hickman

## UNITED NATIONS

In Tuvalu, a small group of islands in the South Pacific, communities have traditionally supplemented poor soil with compost to grow the taro and yams that make up the bulk of their diet. Now, some find that they must grow their crops in old kerosene cans. Encroaching ocean tides have made the soil too salty to cultivate the tubers. Tuvalu's smallest islets, once large enough to sustain handfuls of coconut trees, also are being lapped up by the rising tides.

Although scientists do not fully understand what is causing ocean levels to increase, many blame melting glaciers warmed by rising global temperatures. The U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that ocean levels will rise at least 20 inches by 2100. And they're hard pressed to figure out how to stop the seas from quietly engulfing low-lying nations like Tuvalu.

Climate change isn't the only worry of island nations. As prices fall for traditional export crops like sugar and coffee, islands are increasingly relying on tourism to strengthen their economies. With the hordes of visitors come strains on fresh water supplies and waste management systems. The cruise industry, in particular, wreaks environmental havoc on islands. Garbage left by cruise ships docking at Caribbean ports quadruples the per capita tonnage generated by islanders and chokes landfills. Meanwhile, waste dumped at sea gets sucked ashore by heavy tides, clogging beaches. In 1998, Australia spent millions of dollars to stave off starvation in drought stricken Papua New Guinea when freshwater supplies were insufficient to irrigate crops.

In 1994, representatives of more than 100 countries met in Barbados to address environmental threats unique to small island nations. They drew up the Barbados Program of Action, which laid out the dangers of climate change and increased tourism. In late September, the Association of Small Island States, a coalition of some 40 island and low-lying coastal nations brought the Barbados plan to the U.N. General

Assembly in a special session to assess progress and drum up support for more vigorous action. Islanders want trade partners like the United States to recognize the importance of locally owned, sustainable tourist enterprises that protect biodiversity and keep profits within the local economy. They also want the industrialized world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are largely blamed for global warming.

At the United Nations, the islanders and their supporters stressed again and again that after the Barbados meeting, they went home and got to work. Across the Caribbean, South Pacific and Indian Ocean, island nations developed strategies for sustainable tourism, and established regional disaster management agreements and biodiversity strategies. But five years later, the United States, European Union, World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund have all reneged on their end of the deal. The money to enforce new policies never materialized and developed countries on the whole have failed to meet the emissions reductions they had agreed to at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The WTO is only now assembling its working group on sustainable tourism development.

At the conclusion of the two-day session, the General Assembly adopted a pair of documents once again calling on the international community to provide the financial resources and development assistance needed to help island nations address the environmental risks they face. But the assembly didn't begin to address the difficult questions of what is causing global warming and how industrialized countries must curb their consumption of the world's resources. Sustainable tourism on these small islands won't stop rising tides. Developed countries, says Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, must "face their ecological debt to humanity." ■

Amanda B. Hickman is a writer in New York.

# Etc.

## School for Scandal

Vermont's Norwich University—a private military college that has enrolled at least 11 students with ties to Kopassus, Indonesia's brutal special forces—is beginning to attract the attention of Congress (see "School Ties," Oct. 31).

According to *In These Times* contributing editor Terry J. Allen, writing in the *Boston Globe*, Rep. James P. McGovern (D-Mass.) and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) have requested that the Defense Department "identify all members of the Indonesian military, including recruits, studying in the United States" and demand "their immediate return to Indonesia."

Both McGovern and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) have asked the Clinton administration to examine the Norwich program. "These are foreign nationals bankrolled by an organization engaged in human rights violations," McGovern told Allen. "They aren't there because Vermont is pretty in the fall; they are there to get the training and expertise Norwich provides."

## Las Vegas 1, Wal-Mart 0

Las Vegas has been spared one less monument to sprawl. On Oct. 6, the Clark County commission voted 3 to 2 to approve zoning regulations locking out a 200,000-square-foot Wal-Mart supercenter. Two others could face a similar fate.

The fight for the ordinance was spearheaded by the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 711. Calling on the community to "protect its neighborhoods" from Wal-Mart, the campaign cited the company's annihilation of small, locally owned businesses, as well as its record of scant employee benefits and dismal pay (see "Las Vegas vs. Wal-Mart," Oct. 3).

## Mumia's Last Chance?

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge has set an execution date for Mumia Abu-Jamal. He is scheduled to die by lethal injection on Dec. 2.

Having exhausted his state appeals, Abu-Jamal's lawyers are filing a habeas corpus appeal in federal court, which could postpone the governor's orders.

Ridge ordered Abu-Jamal's execution despite calls for a moratorium on executions from the Pennsylvania Bar Association, which has called the system racially biased.

Abu-Jamal has become a national symbol to death penalty opponents. "Belief in his guilt or innocence," Angela Davis told *Agence France Presse*, "does not have to determine involvement in the campaign to stop the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal."

Kristin Kolb



# The Left Is Wrong on Vouchers

**W**hen I was young, the left stood for power to the people, money to the poor, and doing everything possible to put the oppressed in charge of their own lives. Today, no policy accomplishes those goals more clearly or effectively than school choice.

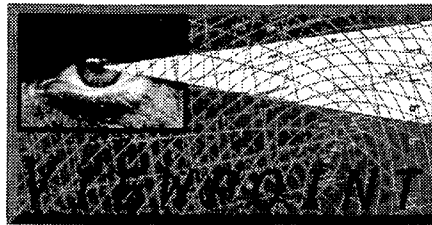
The poor's rage against schools is immediate, visceral and urgent. Most of the poor—especially African-Americans, Latinos and recent immigrants, as well as a large and growing diversity of religious minorities—believe they have been dissed in school, by school and generally by educators out of school. Memories haunt parents of the principal who did not respond or the teacher who did not care. This does not mean the poor are against public education. Most schools offer good experiences. But when schools fail, they fail with an enduring emotional resonance that lasts for generations.

To be sure, schools in all sectors—public, private, religious and home—fail more people than the poor. But the rich and professional, or simply the aggressive and adept, can usually find ways to make their schools change. And if they don't, they can exercise their power and leave. Suburban districts, urban specialty magnet schools and the religious/private education sectors are full of right-wing conservatives who believe it their just due to buy their way out of bad schools. These schools are also full of left-wing liberals and radicals who have done the same.

In Milwaukee, the Parental Choice Program authorizes families with incomes up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level to enroll their children in private schools. Last year, more than 5,000 children took advantage of the program. This year, the number is expected to exceed 8,000. The program has not only liberated thousands of poor children from failing and over-crowded schools, it also has spurred Milwaukee's public schools into a new series of long-overdue

reforms. Here is the making of a strong left agenda: Let dissatisfied parents opt out, but insist that no one leave until all the poor truly have had their chance for a good education.

Dogmatic conservatives and their leftist counterparts both object to



Milwaukee's school choice program. The right objects to the income-based formula. The left believes choice threatens the concept of "public education."

School choice is also an example of applying consumer market pressure against monopoly power—the basis of cooperative theory and practice, as well as boycotts. The prospect of the poor—who lack the capital or experience to create and manage their own institutions—attempting something new and challenging, profoundly influencing their own future, is not a conservative idea. For the past five centuries, it has been the basis of

religious, bourgeois, socialist, nationalist and Marxist liberation struggles. Putting oppressed people in charge of their own power and money has been the basis of welfare rights, Medicaid, Head Start and food stamps. It is a fundamental strain of American progressivism, from Roger Williams to Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King.

So why are conservative, free-marketeting Republicans championing this radical agenda?

Conservatives have gotten smart. They understand that school choice is for Democrats what the abortion issue is for Republicans. It divides traditional constituencies. School choice moves poor, working-class and minority voters

away from the Democratic Party line and attracts them to George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism." As national elections heat up, school choice will become Republicans' trump card for attracting a growing independent and Democratic voting base.

School choice fits the right's market ideology. But it also endows the right with the same personal experience that elite liberals found in civil rights and labor movements generations ago: the partnership of intensely held, commonly exercised bonds with oppressed people with whom they previously had little to share and virtually no personal acquaintance.

The bourgeois left, meanwhile, has gotten stupid. It is as if, though grown-up enough to know better, it still lived in the Cambridge-Upper-West-Side-Madison-Berkeley intellectual ghetto. These liberals don't even know enough poor and working-class people to know how they think, or what their children mean to them.

If they did, they would discover that the poor know better than they when juvenile warehousing masquerades as

**The right understands that school choice is for Democrats what the abortion issue is for Republicans.**

public education. They would learn that the poor know who has access to the money, the power and the future, and who's locked out. They would hear that the poor have never met anyone against school choice who did not already have it.

The poor know that the fundamental difference among schools is not public or private, governmental or independent, religious or secular. It is good and bad. Good schools are safe, nurturing, disciplined and challenging. Bad schools are not. ■

*John Gardner is an organizer and the at-large director of the Milwaukee Public School Board.*

# New Labor OLD POLITICS

By David Moberg

Los Angeles

**T**wo different styles of political work bumped into each other at the AFL-CIO's biennial convention here in mid-October. The collision was hardly fatal, but it did leave a few dents and bruises as well as questions about organized labor's political direction. At the crossroads was a debate on labor's presidential endorsement. While Al Gore won the official nod handily, it was not without dissension.

When John Sweeney won his insurgent bid for president of the AFL-CIO four years ago, his administration made increasing the involvement of union members a top priority. This was partly a practical issue: If unions were going to organize more workers, win contract fights and advance their political causes, they needed the members to do much of the work. Whether unions were trying to recruit new members or get working-class voters to back pro-labor candidates, other union members would be most effective at getting the message out. Also, if members and local union officials had a greater voice in their unions, they would be more likely to work on union causes, listen to union leaders and identify with organized labor's point of view.

This was a stark contrast to old-style labor politics, when many union leaders were simply handing out money to politicians, making endorsements and then sending out lists of officially sanctioned candidates. This didn't work very well for the candidates, and it was even worse for labor, which was always dramatically outspent by business interests and often ignored by candidates after the checks cleared.

The AFL-CIO tried to put this new strategy into practice by developing a network of political activists in key districts, encouraging volunteer organizers, promoting stronger central labor councils through its "Union Cities" program and linking up at the grassroots level with students, church groups, environmentalists and other allies. In politics, the labor movement emphasized educating members on issues and trying to build a rank-and-



S. SCHOTT/NEWSMAKERS

Al Gore hopes the AFL-CIO endorsement will reinvigorate his sputtering campaign.

file political operation that would last beyond election time. This was partly a new way to package politics that recognized what polls and experience showed: Many union members didn't like being told how to vote, but they did appreciate information on issues and candidates.

The new strategy was working, even if it had not yet succeeded in building lasting grassroots political organizations. But earlier this year, the pressures of presidential politics began to swamp the new approach. A few unions, such as AFSCME (public workers) and the Communications Workers, signaled their interest in an early endorsement of Gore.

The vice president has been a fixture at union conventions and unusually passionate—before labor audiences, anyway—about the right to organize. But while most unions appreciated



President Clinton's vetoes of right-wing, anti-labor legislation, industrial unions, in particular, were angry about the administration's advocacy of free trade and seeming disinterest in the continuing loss of manufacturing jobs, even as overall unemployment declined. Many were opposed to any early endorsement of Gore, partly because of these policy differences. The AFL-CIO executive council declined to endorse anyone in its three meetings earlier this year, agreeing to postpone any endorsements by individual unions until there was unity.

But as Gore's campaign began to sputter, his labor supporters became more insistent on bolstering his run with an endorsement. Even though an eventual endorsement seemed quite likely, Gore's supporters argued that a failure to endorse early would be seen as a defeat. Although Gore and former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley had similar pro-labor voting records (and similar views on trade), many pro-Gore union staff and leaders cited the vice president's attendance at their conventions or ribbon-cuttings as reasons to back him. After all, they had a "relationship" with Gore. "We sort of owe it to him," says Electrical Workers Vice President Gloria Johnson.

Bradley worked to woo labor support, visiting union halls and picket lines and making his own strong statements on protecting the right of workers to organize. He solicited support from many leaders, including Teamsters President James Hoffa, but in the end he had no strong partisans. Whatever hesitations labor people had about Clinton's record and Gore's involvement in it, Bradley had not been cultivating their support continually over the years and was not offering a platform that was decisively more pro-labor than Gore's.

The debate was less Gore versus Bradley and more between Gore now, or Gore later. Gore partisans argued that with primaries coming earlier and in a more compressed season, labor had to weigh in early to be effective. But with the vice president's lackluster poll numbers, there were questions about whether labor was getting on board with a sure winner. Labor political strategists noted that polls this early have been wrong in all but one presidential election since 1980, but union polls of their members—which tellingly were not released—generally suggested a tightening race between Gore and Bradley (with at best a small margin over GOP front-runner George W. Bush).

A variety of unions—including the Service Employees, Teamsters, Steelworkers and Autoworkers—argued that their members hadn't been educated on the candidates or the issues and hadn't been able to express their views. In some cases, the emphasis on process coincided with misgivings

about Gore or a hope to influence his positions on issues ranging from stopping Mexican trucks from crossing into the United States to keeping China out of the World Trade Organization. In the end, only the UAW and Teamsters voted against endorsement in the executive council, but eight other unions—including the Machinists, PACE (paper and chemical workers) and IBEW (electrical workers)—abstained.

Although Food and Commercial Workers President Doug Dority personally supported Gore, he favored making no endorsement as of the Saturday before the convention. "We have to identify the issues with the members and let them have a voice," Dority said. "We try to operate on the basis of which candidate stands for which issues. Gore and Bradley are both pretty close—neither goes as far as we want."

But the next day, after Dority received messages from Sweeney and President Clinton, the UFCW voted to endorse Gore immediately. Similarly, while the Service Employees union had insisted that it would stick to its internal review of candidates and not endorse, at the last minute Sweeney's old union backed Gore.

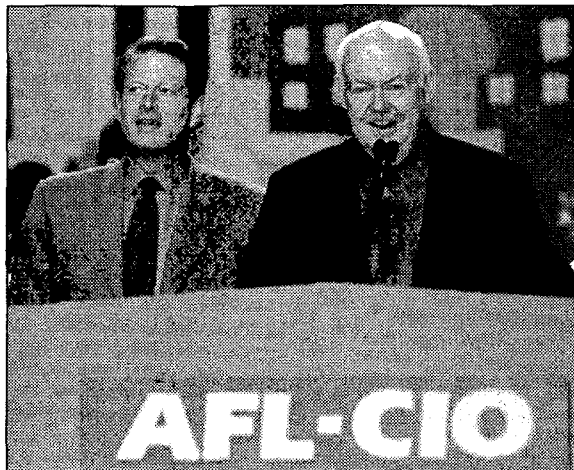
On the eve of the convention vote, Steelworkers President George Becker was still planning to abstain from endorsing. After six meetings with Gore, he was still not convinced that the vice president understood how recent trade deals and current policies were devastating industrial workers. Gore met for another hour with Becker and several top officers, and Becker came

away prepared to gamble that Gore might turn out to be a surprise in office—much as southerner Lyndon Johnson had surprised everyone by being a stronger advocate of civil rights than his predecessor, the supposedly liberal northerner John Kennedy. "I got definite signals from Gore that he understands these trade laws represent corporate and financial interests, and they should represent people," Becker says. "I came away with the conclusion we had a guy who was going to work with us. I just know that I pressured him every way that I can, and I believe he has responded."

Before the convention began, Sweeney seemed to have lined up the two-thirds he deemed necessary to make the endorsement. Ultimately, many leaders voted for the vice president more to support Sweeney or to preserve the appearance of labor unity than to embrace Gore passionately. John Wilhelm, president of the

Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees, said that he is far less interested in presidential politics than in escalating organizing. "I don't like the tendency of the labor movement to rip itself apart over politicians," he says.

Robert Wages, vice president of PACE, lacks enthusiasm for either candidate. "But if you get people right on issues and enthusiastic enough to vote," he argues, "you don't have to worry about how they vote on candidates."



Gore and John Sweeney at the podium.

*Union polls of their members, which tellingly were not released, generally suggested a tightening race between Gore and Bradley.*

A few union leaders resented the pressure to endorse early, arguing that it undermined their efforts to build grassroots activism and unnecessarily created a fracture in the labor movement. "If Gore had the patience to wait, the endorsement would have meant something," says one union leader who asked not to be named. "We've been working for five years to build up the middle level of the union involvement in politics. They will resent this."

The convention did take other steps that could strengthen its new turn toward member involvement. It proposed a "New Alliance" strategy to bolster state labor federations and central labor councils, which should lead to more union involvement in those local organizations and strategic planning for politics and organizing. It initiated a series of hearings, which may lead to a labor drive to push for an end to sanctions against employers of undocumented workers, part of labor's recent turn to embrace organizing of immigrants. The AFL-CIO also continues to encourage union members to run for office, aiming for 2,000 candidates next year. And unions concerned with globalization showed new enthusiasm for cross-border solidarity with other workers and alliances with environmental groups to fight the World Trade Organization, especially at the meetings scheduled for the end of November in Seattle.

In a pre-convention conference, the federation enhanced its ties with a new religious movement to support worker

justice. It also proposed creating a new Internet portal, hoping to lure union members from Yahoo! and AOL. Union members also may get both Internet service and computers at a discount. Such a program could permit more communication among union members as well as between leaders and the rank and file.

Whatever the arguments on behalf of Gore, the top-level endorsement of a particular candidate, as opposed to an emphasis on pushing all candidates to take stronger pro-labor positions, remained a throwback to an older and less-effective style of politics. In his speech to union delegates, Gore pledged to be "a voice for working families in

*The top-level endorsement of a particular candidate is a throwback to an older and less-effective style of labor politics.*

everything I do and say." Emphasizing every union link in his personal history, he brought workers who'd been persecuted for trying to form a union to the podium and told their stories and pledged to

strengthen the right to organize. He vowed to veto anti-union legislation and fight for authority to enforce labor rights and environmental protection in future trade deals. It's a speech that will work well before union audiences throughout the campaign, but it is not likely to be the message in most of his speeches.

There's no question that a sympathetic president is crucial for labor, but its long-term revival relies more on increasing its commitment to turning its members into better-educated and organized campaigners for stronger unions and politics that more clearly reflect the needs of working families. ■

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# WHERE'S THE PARTY?

## FOR THE NEW PARTY, ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

BY TED KLEINE

**S**even years ago, when it was still new, the New Party had a vision of becoming a third force in American politics, a left-of-Clinton political machine that would unite blacks, Latinos, union members, environmentalists, poor whites, ex-hippies—everyone who'd never been invited to join a country club, or even a Rotary luncheon.

It seemed like a good time to start a third party: The original George Bush had just posted the worst showing by an incumbent president since William Howard Taft's 25 percent in 1912. The New Party's plan was to start by winning local elections, then grow into a national party that would fight for universal health care, a higher minimum wage and "starting gate equality"—a guarantee that every child would be adequately fed, housed and educated up to the age of 20.

But in 1997, the party lost a legal fight to force states to allow "fusion" tickets: ballots on which the same candidate could be endorsed by more than one party. The hope had been that Democrats would become dependent on New Party swing voters, and eventually that the New Party would be able to field its own candidates. After the Supreme Court slapped down fusion, the New Party's future as a national movement seemed dead.

The fusion decision discouraged at least one of the party's founders. "If you can't get ballot status, what's the use of calling yourself a party?" says Joel Rogers, a University of Wisconsin professor who helped found the party but withdrew from its leadership following the fusion ruling. "I decided to get uninvolved at the national level, because I decided the prospects to get a ballot line at the national level were not good."

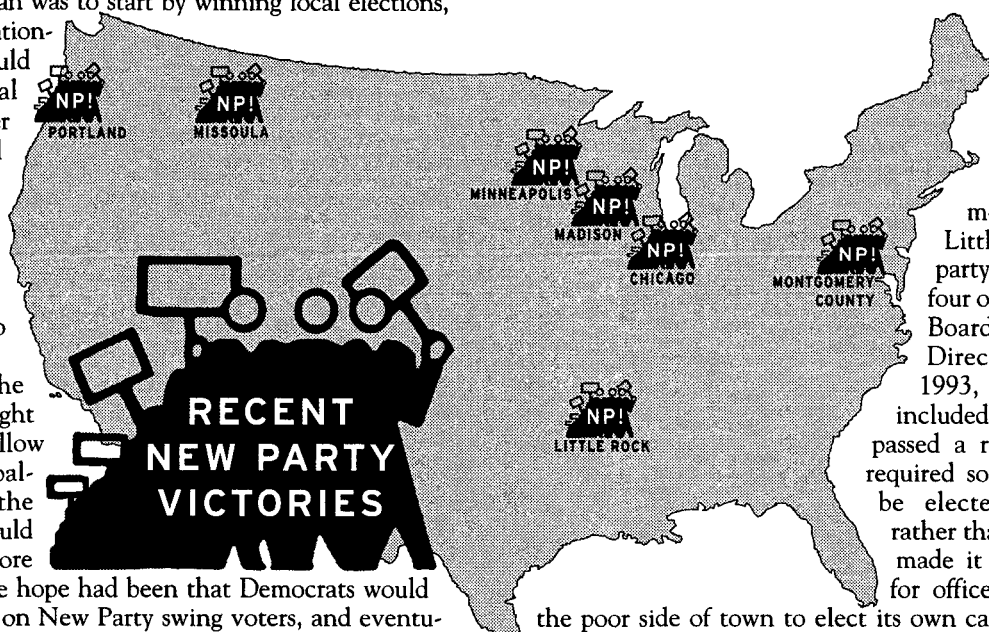
New Party operatives have seen the same writing on the wall. The party is no longer plotting to put a senator or a president in office, says communications director Adam

Glickman. But quietly (some affiliates don't even use the "New Party" label), the group has put together a confederation that's winning local, nonpartisan offices in communities all over the map: Chicago; Little Rock, Ark.; Madison, Wis.; Minneapolis; Missoula, Mont.; Montgomery County, Md.; and Portland, Ore. "We're looking in the short term to take over certain turfs," Glickman says. "We're investing our resources in a half-dozen places. There's no better way to build a political movement in America than to run a city."

**N**owhere has the New Party shaken up the local establishment more than in Little Rock, where party members hold four of 11 seats on the Board of City Directors. First, in 1993, a coalition that included the New Party passed a referendum that required some directors to be elected from wards rather than at large. This made it cheaper to run for office and easier for

the poor side of town to elect its own candidates. Then, Little Rock progressives successfully lobbied the board to pass a campaign-finance reform law that limited fundraising to five months before an election, stopping developers from handing out \$1,000 "campaign contributions" every time one of their projects came before the board. And they defeated a \$15 million sales tax that would have built and funded an addition to the county jail.

But the party achieved its current power by taking on an issue that appeals both to white environmentalists and inner-city blacks: urban sprawl. Since 1960, Little Rock has nearly quintupled in area, from 25 to 120 square miles. Almost all of the new development is in the Pulaski County School District, which is 75 percent white. Well-



heeled homeowners are enjoying Little Rock city services while avoiding its schools. Yet the entire city may have to pay for a sewer plant to serve the expensive new developments.

Running on the sprawl issue, the New Party elected two black city directors in 1998. Johnnie Pugh and Genevieve Stewart, both members of ACORN (which was founded in Little Rock), joined Willie Hinton, another black director, and Paul Kelly, a white environmentalist who once belonged to the Green Party. The New Party was a way to unite the interests of Greens and ACORN members, who tend to be poor and black, says Jim Lynch, co-chairman of the Little Rock New Party's steering committee. That was a significant step in a city where racial mistrust lingers from the days of the civil rights movement.

Now, Little Rock's New Party is trying to force the city to adopt a growth plan that would guarantee low-income housing in newly developed areas and encourage building in the empty inner city, where the blight has gotten so bad that a Wal-Mart recently left for whiter pastures. Lynch says the group also favors a special taxing district or developer impact fees to pay for sewer improvements in the newer developments. "We want sustainable urban growth that doesn't eat into resources that can't be replaced," he says.

In Missoula, New Party members are campaigning for a Nov. 2 referendum on a living wage, a key issue for the party nationwide. If the Missoula measure passes, it will boost to \$8 an hour the pay of city workers, as well as employees of companies who receive tax breaks, grants or loans from the city.

It's needed badly in Missoula, where more than 100 city workers are toiling for less than subsistence wages, says Councilman Jim McGrath, leader of the four-member New Party faction on the 12-person City Council. "Missoula's a really wonderful town," McGrath says. "It has a tradition of working class mixing with intellectual and embracing a wonderful environment. On the other hand, we're near the bottom of the country in wages. We have a tradition of opposing unions. There is a need here for progressive policies."

Missoula also has a particular need for stronger environmental regulations, McGrath says. The town lies in a smog-collecting bowl, and has experienced serious air quality problems. To cut pollution, the New Party has promoted a bike lane system, worked to build a bike/pedestrian bridge over the Clark Fork River, and recommended investing in public transportation.



Johnnie Pugh and Jim Lynch

Like its counterparts in Little Rock, the Missoula New Party got a chance to assert itself when the election laws were changed recently. Starting two years ago, all local elections became nonpartisan. McGrath was first elected in 1995 as a Democrat, but he, and other New Party members, didn't really fit in with the "ironclad conservative Democrats" who dominated the City Council. Now, it's very clear who are the progressives and who are the reactionaries in Missoula elections. "The first thing that happened when we went nonpartisan was the Chamber of Commerce came out and endorsed a slate running against us," McGrath says. "So now it's very clear that we've got a Chamber of

Commerce Party and a New Party."

In the 1997 elections, developers formed the "Citizens for Common Sense Government," pouring \$40,000 into a mud-slinging campaign charging that the New Party was "killing jobs by opposing development," Glickman says. Two New Party incumbents lost, although another won an open seat. The party was far from finished in Missoula, though. The next year, two New Party members, Ron Erickson and Gail Gutsche, were elected to the state legislature on the Democratic line.

This fall, Missoula's New Party is aiming to add a fifth member to the City Council. That's a big enough arena for McGrath. Building a nationwide movement doesn't interest him. "Personally, I am devoted to local politics because I feel it's where I can make a difference," he says. "My interest fades as I get farther from home."



Phil Andrews

In other parts of the country, the New Party has functioned more as a political action committee than as an electoral party. Progressive Montgomery, the party's chapter in Montgomery County, Md., has worked with churches and labor unions to put left-of-center candidates into office. Progressive Montgomery is affiliated with a dozen elected officials in the suburbs of Washington, including three members of the Montgomery County Council and a member of the Prince George's County Council.

Montgomery is one of the richest counties in America, but there are neighborhoods of low-income blacks and Latinos in older areas of Silver Spring and Rockville. Those voters helped elect County Councilman Phil Andrews, a Progressive Montgomery-endorsed candidate who once led Common Cause Maryland. Once Andrews got into office, he irked establishment Democrats by introducing an ordinance that would have required companies with county contracts or



Jim McGrath



subsidies to pay their workers \$10.44 an hour—more than double the minimum wage. It was needed: Since 1989, the number of Montgomery County children living in poverty has increased by 68 percent.

Progressive Montgomery, which had been working for several years to pass a living wage initiative, backed Andrews by leading a march through Silver Spring and bringing 500 people to a County Council hearing. But under pressure from business groups, two council members reneged on written pledges to support a living wage and it failed. Progressive Montgomery is now working to put a pro-living wage majority on the board.

In other cities, the New Party seems destined for a smaller role. In New York, which does allow fusion, it collaborated with unions, gay groups and immigrant groups to start a Working Families ballot line, which endorsed Democrat Peter Vallone for governor in 1998. The line received more than 50,000 votes, guaranteeing a place on the ballot in the next election. "The Working Families ticket got a great many of their votes in Park Slope, the Upper West Side and similar neighborhoods, as well as around Buffalo, where they had strong union support," says Micah Sifry, who is researching a book on third parties. "Many of their voters were likely the kind of people who read *The Nation*."



Serena Cruz

But the New Party has only one active chapter in New York—on Long Island—and has never been able to elect local officials, as it has in smaller towns where grassroots organizing is easier. "The New Party was certainly never able to marshal the institutional players in New York," Glickman admits.

In Portland, the New Party helped elect Serena Cruz to the Multnomah County Commission last year. But Cruz, who joined the party while she was working on the staff of a Portland city commissioner, already sounds disillusioned. "When I first joined, I really felt I was on the verge of a new movement," Cruz says. "I really felt that this was going to provide the basis of a third party. I don't feel that way anymore. I'm really frustrated with folks operating in a marginalized way. Why am I going to put my time and energy and name out there? I don't think they believe that their values are the values people share. But they are."

Cruz still supports New Party initiatives, including a living wage for county workers and electing Portland city commissioners from districts, rather than the current at-large system. But she speaks as though her commitment to the party is only nominal. "I'll live my life like a New Party member," she says, "but I won't go to church on Sunday."

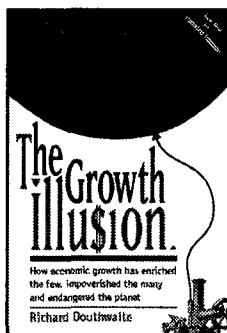
For now, the New Party is likely to remain an umbrella organization for its half-dozen or so local chapters. Five or six years down the road, the party may have the strength to elect a state senator, mayor or even a governor, but they're not there yet. The New Party certainly appeals to a constituency of disaffiliated voters who could be drawn into a third party. And, as the Reform Party is finding out, the time is ripe for alternative candidates. The New Party could benefit from its own Jesse Ventura, a charismatic outsider who drags the movement into the spotlight. "Why shouldn't that be a way of moving forward?" Sifry asks. "We live in an era of entertainment. With the right combination of ingredients, a third party can move very quickly."

In most of its cities, the New Party has done an admirable job of breaking the old model of left-wing parties: a small cell of overeducated white progressives who are more interested in being a virtuous minority than engaging in practical politics. Little Rock City Director Kelly left the local Green Party because it "was trying so hard to reach consensus that they let the world go by." The New Party, on the other hand, drew "low- and moderate-income voters, progressive members [interested in] campaign finance reform, environmental wackos." "We had this meeting," he says, "and the speakers got up and they were old and young, male and female, a more diverse group of people."

If the New Party were simply—to borrow Michael Moore's phrase—a few earnest liberals meeting in the basement of a Unitarian Church, would it have elected an alderman in a black ward in Chicago, as it did last April? Would it have attracted churches and labor unions to its living wage campaign in Maryland? Perhaps the New Party is on the fringe, but so are a lot of Americans: blacks, Latinos, working mothers, union members. "We wouldn't have elected four members to the Little Rock City Council if this was a marginal, lefty, hippie movement," Glickman says. "We're talking about issues that appeal to ordinary people." ■

Ted Kleine is a writer in Chicago.

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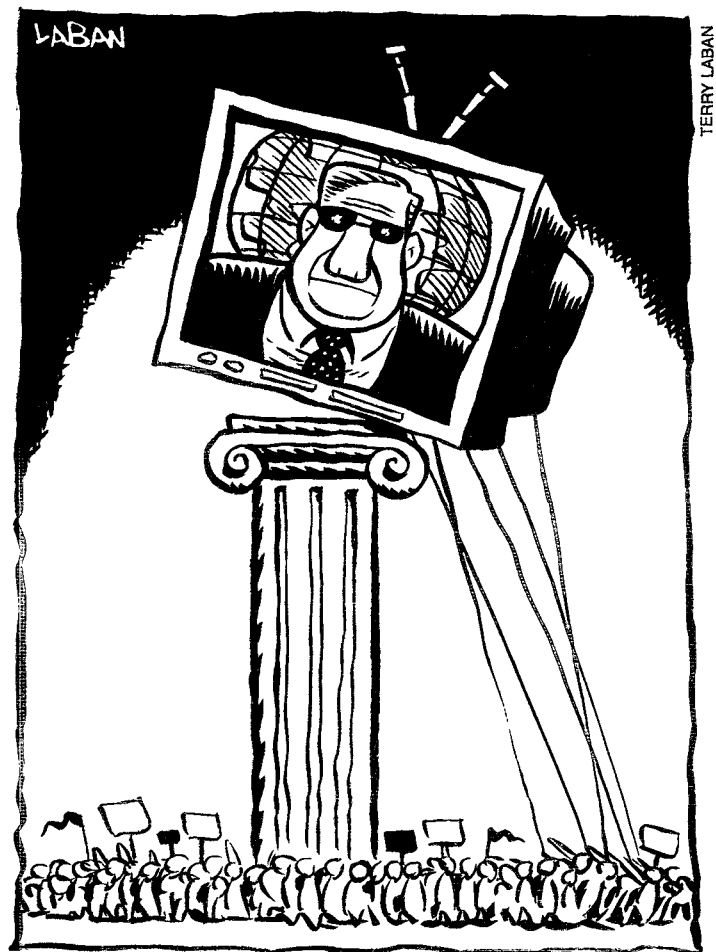
By Robert W. McChesney

American democracy is in a decrepit state—exemplified by a depoliticization that would make a tyrant envious—and the corporate commercial media system is an important factor in understanding how this sorry state came to be. The corporate media cement a system whereby the wealthy and powerful few make the most important decisions with virtually no informed public participation. Crucial political issues are barely covered by the corporate media, or else are warped to fit the confines of elite debate, stripping the ordinary citizenry of the tools they need to be informed, active participants in a democracy. For those who regard inequality and untrammelled commercialism as undermining the requirements of a democratic society, media reform must be on the political agenda.

The corporate media system is not the only factor that explains the woeful state of U.S. democracy, nor is it necessarily the most important one. But it is among the most important problems we face and, accordingly, it has to be on any short list of issues around which all progressive and democratic activists should organize. Likewise, media reform is not winnable as a single-issue campaign; reforming our media system will be impossible unless it is part of a broader movement.

The neoliberal right understands the importance of media far better than the left and has devoted considerable resources to its campaigns to push the media to an explicitly pro-corporate, anti-labor position. Billionaire right-wingers establish political media primarily to propagate pro-business politics and to push the range of political debate ever rightward. The leading U.S. right-wing foundations have devoted nearly all their resources to pushing the media and educational systems to provide more explicitly pro-business positions. The political right also leads the fight against any and all forms of noncommercial and nonprofit media. Failing that, it leads the battle to see that public broadcasting stays within the same narrow ideological boundaries as the commercial media. As a result, PBS refuses to permit labor to sponsor programs about workers but permits business to subsidize programs extolling free enterprise.

Until recently, liberals, progressives and the left in the United States have been notably missing in action in the battle over the media. The response of the progressive and



mainstream foundations, for example, to this right-wing ideological assault has been tepid at best. These groups are uncomfortable about being seen as “political.” Regrettably, organized labor, too, has been snoozing for the most part, providing little to counter this right-wing ideological class war. The political right plays to win; labor and the left are not even playing at all.

There are two general areas—and they sometimes overlap—for media activism. In each, a nascent left, organized labor and the progressive foundations must become active. First, labor (and the left) can create better noncommercial media and generate better results from commercial media independent of changes in government policies and the corporate media system. All of labor needs not only to support aggressively its own newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations and Web sites; it also needs to give money and resources to community and nonprofit media that have no direct labor affiliation. This is a crucial point: Labor needs to be willing to grant considerable editorial leeway to the media it subsidizes. Unless it does so, the media will tend to be timid, overly concerned with pleasing labor’s political hierarchy, and unlikely to produce a medium with vitality and broad appeal. The same holds true for progressive philanthropies: Alternative media cannot be micromanaged by funders and at the same time develop an audience. (This is something the right understands, and it has contributed to the success of its media program.)



In addition, labor and the left need to take another page from the political right, which manipulates traditional U.S. journalism practices as masterfully as a surgeon does a scalpel. Like the right, labor and the progressive philanthropic community also need to support think tanks of experts who can provide labor and left perspectives on social issues for commercial and noncommercial journalists alike. These think tanks can also monitor the massive right-wing campaigns to shape news coverage. The recently formed Institute for Public Accuracy, under the direction of Norman Solomon and Sam Husseini, is doing a terrific job of providing such a service. For the political right, these sorts of activities are especially effective because their operatives and ideas are so comfortable in the halls of the corporate media. Hence so many of the TV political commentators that hail from the right have become interchangeable with the so-called mainstream analysts. These activities will never suffice for the left, but they can help vitalize a noncommercial media sector on the margins and guarantee the best possible performance by the commercial system.

But the second, and most important, area of political activity is organizing to change government media policies. The core problem with the U.S. media system relates to how it is owned, its profit motivation and its reliance upon advertising. The media system is not the result of the blind workings of the mythical free market. In fact, it is a highly noncompetitive industry that is the direct result of explicit government subsidies and policies. Almost all of the important laws and policies that created our media system—like the dreadful 1996 Telecommunications Act, which opened the door to an unprecedented wave of corporate mergers—have been made with zero public input. They are the direct result of super-powerful corporate lobbies muscling their way to the public trough. The corruption of this policy-making process can hardly be exaggerated.

Any attempt to affect U.S. media that does not address structural issues directly through government policies will prove inconsequential in the long run. It is the right and duty of the public to intervene and see that policies enacted in their name reflect their informed consent. Corporate media power must be confronted directly and reduced. A fundamental question that needs to be raised, for example, is why it is OK for the government to quietly subsidize the media giants through tax breaks, deregulation and the gift of the public spectrum, but let the nonprofit and noncommercial media sector starve. Why not use government policies creatively to funnel resources into a nonprofit media sector? For instance, economist Dean Baker has proposed letting all Americans direct up to \$150 of their federal tax payments to the nonprofit medium of their choice. If we made this an issue, there might be numerous other ways we could improve the quality of our media culture without dredging up the specter of an overbearing government.

This is the great advantage of the left: It can provide real solutions to the problems of the media. The right often taps into legitimate concerns people have about media, but its solutions are illusory or counterproductive. Many left media critics present superb analysis of the weaknesses of the status quo but have been reticent about providing concrete solutions; these will develop, they argue, over the course of political struggle and debate. But by the end of the '90s, we have reached the point where media reformers have to provide concrete examples of an alternative; otherwise, many people will have no idea of what exactly they are fighting for.

The heartening news is that over the course of the '90s there has been a decided shift in public sentiment, and an increased openness to structural criticism of the media system. The hyper-commercialism of the system, staggering corporate concentration and low-grade journalism have undermined the claims that ours is a free press dedicated to public service and democracy, or even the claim that the handful of conglomerates that rule over our media system are "giving the people what they want."

This activism has taken the form of numerous local media watch groups, which monitor the lame content of local TV news and work, for example, to have liquor and cigarette billboards removed from working-class and minority residential neighborhoods. It also takes the form of microbroadcasters who use low-power radio signals to make an end run around the banality of corporate radio fare. At the national level, new groups like Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting are organizing to establish a genuine, well-funded public radio and TV system, replacing the low-budget, increasingly commercial, elitist operation that is currently under the thumb of corporate underwriters and careerist bureaucrats. There is also the newly formed People for Better TV, which is demanding that commercial broadcasters actually provide some public service in exchange for the publicly owned television spectrum they are licensed to use at no charge. The value of this example of corporate welfare over the past six decades runs well into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

In the short term, the immediate need is to connect the struggle for media reform with the movement for campaign finance reform. Much of the estimated \$3.5 billion that will be spent on electoral campaigns in 2000 will pay for TV ads on commercial stations. This is an enormous cash cow for the corporate media, and it has struck a dagger into the integrity of our political culture. The corporate media are the foremost opponents of any reform in campaign finance that might remove our electoral system from the private reserve of the wealthiest one quarter of one percent of Americans, who by some estimates presently make a whopping 80 percent of individual campaign contributions. Instead, why not make it a condition of getting a broadcast license that a broadcaster will air no paid political advertising during electoral campaigns?

**Progressives have been providing little to counter the right-wing ideological class war. The political right plays to win; labor and the left aren't playing at all.**

Elsewhere, Sen. Paul Wellstone is among the most outspoken of several members of Congress who can see the disastrous implications of permitting our media and telecommunications system to fall into so few hands. Indeed, it is very difficult to reconcile any notion of democracy with such a tightly held system accountable only to Wall Street and Madison Avenue. There is a resurgent movement to recharge our antitrust laws with the same populist commitment to democracy that brought them into existence 100 years ago.

There are numerous other policy proposals to democratize our media system floating around. The key point is to create a diverse media system with a significant nonprofit and non-commercial sector. Corporate media PR flacks argue that any effort to reduce their power would lead to government control of the media. The concern with the state having an improper role in the media is quite legitimate, but even if all of the proposals were enacted, the corporate media would still be the dominant sector of our media system. In truth, the corporate media actually welcome the government playing an aggressive role in the media system, as long as it is in their interests and not those of the citizenry.

It is easy to be depressed about the prospects for media reform, just like it is easy to lose hope for progressive social change altogether. The media giants are unusually powerful adversaries, with massive lobbies. They also are in the enviable position of owning the very news media that people would look to for coverage of media reform issues.

But there are reasons to be optimistic. When one sees the extent to which the media giants go to keep their lobbying activities in Washington secret, you can understand their fear that the public will learn the truth behind this corrupt system. When Americans actually hear about the giveaway of the public spectrum or who benefits from political advertising, they are outraged. The job for media activists is to make this a public issue. If we can get that far, our chances of winning improve dramatically.

Moreover, what is beginning to take shape in the United States is happening all over the world, as the corporate media system globalizes in conjunction with "free market" economic policies. Across the world, democratic left political parties and movements are making media reform a cornerstone issue in their platforms, and they are enjoying success at the polls.

Finally, media reform offers certain advantages to the U.S. left. It is an issue that affects every strand of the left and could bring diverse groups together to form common ground. But media reform also resonates across the political spectrum. Even so-called conservatives often are appalled by the commercial saturation of our culture. The average American now spends nearly 12 hours per day consuming some form of media, so media reform addresses something that all Americans experience directly.

The fate of media reform and the U.S. left are inexorably intertwined, and in their fortunes resides perhaps the best hope for the United States to become a democracy ruled by the many rather than the few. ■

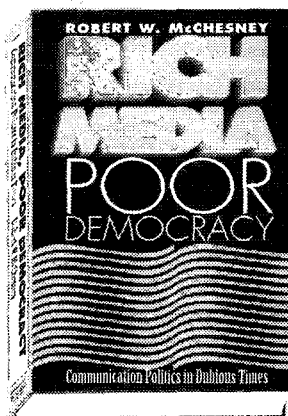
Robert W. McChesney teaches at the University of Illinois. This article is adapted from *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press ([www.press.uillinois.edu](http://www.press.uillinois.edu)).

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# Backtrack

By Kim Phillips-Fein

feel a little betrayed themselves. Neatly positioned to tap into post-Littleton anxieties, *Stiffed* says almost nothing about women, let alone anti-feminism. Instead, it is devoted to chronicling the rage of America's men, who chafe against the "untenable and insulting" demands placed on them by our culture.

Faludi opens *Stiffed* with a heartfelt admission that to write the book, she had to admit that men did not, as she'd thought, hold "the reins of power"; instead, even the wife-beaters among them often felt weak, themselves battered by economic forces and internal demons. She writes: "What if we put aside for a time the assumption of male dominance, put away our feminist rap sheet of men's crimes and misdemeanors, or our anti-feminist indictment of women's heist of male authority, and just looked at what men have experienced in the past generation?"

Faludi wanders through closing shipyards and downsizing aerospace firms, sits in on Promise Keepers meetings and interviews the Spur Posse (a group of Southern California adolescents who compete to see who can sleep with the most women). She meets Sylvester Stallone several times for drinks, sympathizes with the plight of the male porn star, hangs out with Citadel cadets and chats up the drag queens the cadets go out with. Its canny aim at the zeitgeist aside, the book's not awful. There are some rich bits of reportage, and many inadvertently funny moments, like the wannabe porn star trying desperately to get an erection while surrounded by an increasingly angry technical staff. For sheer weirdness, it's hard to top her description of the cadet who comments that he's against Shannon Faulkner coming to The Citadel because: "When we're in the showers, it's very intimate. We're one mass, naked together, and it makes us closer. ... You're shaved, you're naked, you're afraid together. You can cry."

But when Faludi stops reporting things and starts analyzing them, her ideas get fuzzy and her interpretations

bizarre. Seemingly cribbing from the publicity material for *Saving Private Ryan*, she argues that World War II was the golden age of American manhood. The Army took a generation of fatherless boys and made men out of them: "Boys whose Depression-era fathers could neither provide for them nor guide them into manhood were placed under the benevolent wing of a vast male-run orphanage called the Army and sent into battle. There, firm but kindly senior officers acting as surrogate fathers watched over them as they were tempered into men in the heat of a heroic struggle against malevolent enemies."

When they got back to the States, Henry Wallace envisioned a quiet, productive masculinity, embodied in his idea of the "century of the common man." (Faludi says little about the politics behind this vision, though she does note that Wallace was "deemed a Communist dupe.") But Henry Luce's glitzy American Century defeated Wallace's homelier vision: "If Wallace's manly ideal was all about parental care and nurturance, Luce's was all about taking control—and, even more important, displaying it." In the early '60s, American boys were still being promised the world. ("What Kennedy was selling was a government-backed program of man-making, of federal masculinity insurance.")

But one by one, the promises made to postwar boys were broken. Outer space, the promised frontier, turned out to be a sad disappointment, "a sterile environment, not a place where women and children could or would want to settle." When "their war" finally came, it was Vietnam, which did not provide the secure sense of mission offered by World War II. "Even if an emergency airlift of fatherly officers had provided better battlefield guidance, it could not have rescued a battle misguided from the start. Good national leaders, good fathers, wouldn't have deployed their sons to such a war in the first place." Things just got worse for men. They lost their jobs in the '70s and early '80s; then their wives went out and got work—and sometimes even lives—of their own.

Last summer a short news item appeared in the weekly *New York Press* that nearly made me gag. A truculent reporter described the results of some study using longitudinal data that looked at the childbearing histories of women who scored above average on math tests. Apparently, what the academics found was that these

## Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man

By Susan Faludi  
William Morrow  
662 pages, \$27.50

women are significantly more likely than the general population to have trouble having kids. So, concluded the journalist, math is evolutionarily disadvantageous for women.

I can't wait till Susan Faludi takes this one apart, I thought.

Faludi, the author of the incisive, funny *Backlash* (1991), a full frontal assault on the culture and politics of anti-feminism, once would have had a field day with a study as bogus as this. After all, she'd done a great job debunking lousy social science in the past; remember her witty dissection of the nonexistent "marriage crunch" of the '80s? For that matter, wouldn't it be great if she wrote a *Backlash* for the '90s. There has been plenty of anti-feminist ink spilled in the past decade, and who better than Faludi to mop it up?

Now Faludi's new book, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, finally has come out, and women who've waited eight years for a follow-up to *Backlash* may

This reinterpretation of 20th century American history in terms of "manhood" weaves in and out of 600 pages of interviews and reporting. Though Faludi's prototype of the betrayed man is clearly a white, blue-collar worker, she talks to middle managers and football fans, a movie star and a playwright, gang members and the editors of *Details* magazine. (She touches only briefly on gay men, who you'd think might have had some influence on ideas about masculinity.) Today, Faludi concludes, men find themselves with nothing to do, no frontier to seek, no women to protect. "At the close of the century, men find themselves in an unfamiliar world where male worth is measured only by participation in a celebrity-driven consumer culture and

Men join the Promise Keepers not because they wish to regain control over the home, but because they want to "search for new ways of being men." The Citadel, she now sees, is a bastion not of male privilege, but of a gentle, caring masculine culture: "Women were just proxies for the real war—against a new economy and a new culture that could not be battled with obscenities and violence." No doubt that would relieve the female cadet who was set on fire by her male peers.

**W**ith its fusty Victorian nostalgia for a lost "manhood," and its elegiac descriptions of absent fathers and aching sons, *Stuffed* reads like a collaboration between Midge Decter

of the men she describes seem to have more to do with ordinary economic distress than being confined by gender, anyway. The real appeal of the book isn't what it says about men, but its admonishment to women to try harder to understand the male plight. Ultimately, *Stuffed* says more about the timidity and confusion of feminism than it does about men.

How hard *do* men have it, really? They still earn more than women; they still do less housework and child care; they aren't publicly scolded for wanting to make their own choices about sexuality and marriage and children. It's true that working-class men have been screwed by the economic policies of the '80s and '90s, but it's not like

everything is rosy for women, who still occupy the worst-paying jobs in disproportionate numbers. Faludi might say this is beside the point; as she puts it, "while being laid off was agony for a female employee, the one part of her life it didn't ruin was her feminine identity." Fair enough. But surely if it's gotten harder to "be a man," in the good old-fashioned sense of the word, it's not really because of deindustrialization—though it may be true that widening economic inequality spawns all kinds of theories of natural hierarchy,

including gender roles. Nor is it because craft labor is in decline, as it has been for the past century. It's because relations between men and women have been so deeply transformed over the past 25 years. Strangely, Faludi effectively has written a book about men as if women hardly existed at all.

It's hard, after all, to take seriously Faludi's contention that "manhood" is all about apprenticeship, wartime bonding and man-to-man talks. Superiority to women historically has been central to ideas of what it means to be a man; communitarian shibboleths about a "culture of utility" seem rather beside the point. If a man leaves his job and

**Why did the author of a polemic as fiery and smart as *Backlash* write such a saccharine and apologetic second book?**



awarded by lady luck. There is no passage to manhood in such a world."

Unlike the men of the postwar era, men now live in a "culture of ornament," in which manhood is defined by "appearance, by youth and attractiveness, by money and aggression, by posture and swagger and 'props,' by the curled lip and petulant sulk and flexed biceps, and by the glamour of the cover boy."

In lachrymose tones, Faludi reports that men are in crisis because in such a shallow, glittery world, they can no longer support each other. They mourn the closing of a shipyard that employed thousands not because it means losing work: "The more profound loss is of a world where men cared for each other."

and Robert Bly (who Faludi so memorably savaged in *Backlash*). But despite the book's strange tone and many stylistic flaws, readers may find some of its arguments attractive. It's true—though not across the board—that men are losing pay and job security, and are working at service-oriented jobs kind of like the ones to which women historically have been relegated. As the real social benefits of male privilege decline, cartoon-like images of pumped-up, hyper-masculine bodies haunt men who feel they've somehow been denied their just rewards.

I doubt, though, that Faludi's mission to write a *Feminine Mystique* for men will win her many readers; the problems





hobos around the country doing nothing productive whatsoever, he's no less a man. But if a man lets a woman tell him what to

do, then he's "emasculated." Supporting women is part of what it has meant to be a man, but sleeping with lots of women and never getting tied down to any of them also has been a perfectly valid way to show off one's "manhood," in the Danielle Steele sense of the word. Feminism, more specifically than the whole nexus of cultural changes wrought by modernity, challenges the bedrock notion of women's inferiority; as women change their actions and lives, men must do the same.

Since Faludi doesn't say much about transforming men's attitudes toward women, it's hard to know exactly what she means when she writes about imagining "a life without predetermined masculine expectations." Does she *want* men to become more stereotypically "feminine" in their personalities and expectations, as their jobs have become more service-oriented, more unstable, more like women's work? It may well be that servility and docility—the personality traits that made girls suited to factory labor, in the eyes of 19th-century mill owners—would serve working-class men better as the erosion of blue-collar skills and the annihilation of unions leave them increasingly helpless before the forces of the market.

But can anyone really encourage men to embrace these "feminine" traits? When Simone de Beauvoir wrote that there were "two kinds of people, women and human beings," what she meant was that women were socialized to deny their full humanity, trained to be passive, undemanding, their lives directed by others. Rather than claiming for women the courage, economic security and freedom long the province of men, Faludi implies that men should throw out their old expectations of what they deserve in life, becoming more like women, who know they don't deserve anything anyway.

**W**hy did the author of a polemic as fiery and smart as *Backlash* write such a saccharine second book?

Redefining feminism as a movement to liberate men as well as women could be seen as a smart tactical maneuver. Men, Faludi suggests, should join with women to revolt against the stereotypes that bind them, and that often lead men to mistreat women. To encourage this, women should lighten up. But Faludi seems to have forgotten that feminism has succeeded when women band together to demand change from men. In contrast, in *Stuffed* she plays the ultimate feminine role: She listens, attentively, sympathetically, non-judgmentally, to men talk about their pain, and she lets them know she's on their side.

Intentionally or not, *Stuffed* reads like a roundabout apology for *Backlash*. Faludi wants men to know that they're forgiven; she has learned her lesson. Feminists should stop criticizing men, for they need our succor, our affection, our understanding and respect. Looked at this way, it's clear that the notion that men are sexism's real victims has an obvious appeal for a feminist in retreat, for a woman who's just anxious to make it clear she has had the boys' best interests at heart all along. ■

**Kim Phillips-Fein** is a contributing editor for *The Baffler* and a writer in New York.

## None of the Above

By Jefferson Decker

**I**n 1958, a young British writer named Michael Young published *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, a piece of social science fiction describing the rise, circa 2030, of a new British elite, governed not by old money and feudal privilege but by its superior intelligence and education. This new term Young coined, "meritocracy," horrified his philosopher friend Prudence Smith—to combine a Latin and a Greek root in the same word, she told him, was simply uncouth.

Forty years later in the United States, "meritocracy" is still an awkward jumble of meanings. As a concept, the term

tem to test, rank and sort its citizens over the past 50 years. That's quite a task for a single 400-page book, and the end result doesn't quite match its extraordinary ambition. *The Big Test* includes a fascinating look at the origins of standardized testing in the United States and the genealogy of ideas it put into practice. But it also contains many long digressions into the personality and family history of minor characters in this tale. Lemann asks smart, important questions about the relationship between schooling and society, but he skimps on detail about what the certain standardized tests look like and what they measure. Lemann is a veteran journalist and a clear writer, but his book doesn't quite get the whole story.

### The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy

By Nicholas Lemann  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
406 pages, \$27

holds a powerful emotional resonance—it is a symbol of America's promise of opportunity for all and rewards for the brightest, the toughest and the hardest working. Yet as a description of how things work, it lacks sociological precision—not least because reality in this country can be so far from its best aspirations. It isn't clear that we've ever had a real meritocracy in the United States—or if we ever will.

In *The Big Test*, Nicholas Lemann sets out to recount the entire history of this slippery concept—to trace how the United States has used its education sys-

**T**hat story, as Lemann tells it, begins in 1933, when Harvard University tapped James Bryant Conant, a chemistry professor, for its presidency. A life-long Bostonian and descendant of Puritans, Conant seemed, at first, like an uncontroversial choice for the job previously held by a long line of other New England Yankees. But inside, as Lemann reports, Conant "burned with a deep disapproval of the old ways of Harvard." A middle-class engraver's son, Conant had little patience for Harvard's typical student at that time: a wealthy son of New England's upper class. A dedicated research scientist, he disliked the university's reigning ethos, which valued valor on the football field

and membership in the right social clubs—and thought little of academic achievement. And so he set out to change all that.

He began by inaugurating a new scholarship program, selecting a handful of exceptionally talented young men (the thought of picking a few women apparently never occurred to him), initially from the Midwest, to come to the university on a full academic scholarship. But in doing so, he was faced with a problem. For most of Harvard's admissions the dean relied on recommendations from applicants' prep school headmasters, each of whom ranked his boys according to a highly subjective gauge of "character." That might work when all your applicants attended a dozen or so New England boarding schools, but expanding the system to hundreds of large public high schools was another story entirely. Indeed, Harvard's previous attempts to recruit kids from the South and West had often failed to find the best available students—many of those chosen struggled or dropped out.

But Conant had learned of a new way to identify bright high school students—by using the relatively new science of intelligence testing. Conant met a Princeton psychologist (and recovering eugenicist) named Carl Brigham, who had designed something called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or SAT. The test, a series of mathematical problems and word-familiarity exercises,

impressed Conant because he realized that any achievement test, measuring mastery of a specific subject matter, would favor the wealthy, whose parents could purchase the best available education. An "aptitude" test, on the other hand, might rate the "native intelligence" and hidden talent of the taker. In

**Winners with nobody to thank but themselves can make a disturbingly self-satisfied elite.**

1934, he used the SAT for the first time in college admissions—in a competition to select 10 winners of Harvard's new scholarship program—and inaugurated a new era in education.

That was just the start. Conant was fond of Thomas Jefferson's idea of a "natural aristocracy," a group of leaders selected not by accidents of birth but by individual talent. And he imagined a new class of Americans, selected by the SAT and trained by elite colleges, becoming leaders in science, government and public service. These "American radicals," as Conant called them, would understand that their success was a result of the democratization

of opportunity, and would naturally support further egalitarian measures. (Conant suggested that his American radicals would confiscate, "by constitutional means," all wealth at least once per generation—a genuinely radical notion for the president of a well-endowed private university.)

The mechanics of setting up this natural aristocracy were left to Henry Chauncey, a Conant protégé who left Harvard to become the first president of Educational Testing Services (ETS), a New Jersey nonprofit set up to administer the SAT. Through a combination of strong-arm business practices, co-opting of the competition and old-fashioned salesmanship, ETS soon sold America on the utility of the test—first signing up other Ivy League universities, then major state universities, then the rest of the educational system. The SAT quickly became an annual ritual among college-bound students—the big test that determined, as much as anything, where you were bound after graduation.

Conant's idealism turned out to be, as Lemann puts it, "touchingly naïve, or willfully naïve, or just unpardonably naïve." First, even as ETS was being founded, American education was undergoing radical change. In 1944, President Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, better known as the G.I. Bill, giving returning World War II veterans the opportunity to go to college at taxpayer expense. Conant, an unusual egalitarian, became the bill's chief critic. He wanted to take the largest possible pool of young men—one that wasn't limited by racial, class or geographic barriers—and then pluck out the promising few. The G.I. Bill worked in the opposite direction, making college available to the broad middle class, not just its highly talented minority. It also changed the role of Conant and Chauncey's SAT. No longer was the test primarily a tool by which Harvard and Yale could identify a few strivers. Expanding state colleges now used the test to rank and sort

From *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* by Richard H. Minear with an introduction by Art Spiegelman (New Press). Years before he made his name in children's books, Dr. Seuss worked for the short-lived progressive daily newspaper *PM*, producing a large number of anti-Fascist cartoons in 1941 and 1942.







students swiftly and efficiently across the entire spectrum of scores, and assign them to campuses and programs accordingly.

Second, many Americans did not passively accept the rise of a nationwide testing system—not least, Lemann points out, because it “began without any public debate or vote (indeed, without the public’s even noticing).” In the ’50s, California chapters of the right-wing John Birch Society attacked the ETS as an unaccountable, secretive operation run by East Coast technocrats. Birchers passed around a rumor that one ETS test asked, “Would you rather spit on the Bible or the American flag?” In the ’60s and ’70s, left and liberal social critics denounced ETS as ... an unaccountable, secretive operation run by East Coast technocrats. This later group included consumer advocate Ralph Nader, who in 1974 teamed up with New Jersey high school senior (and future journalist) Allan Nairn for a prolonged investigation of ETS. Nader and Nairn helped bring about a 1979 truth-in-testing law, which finally required ETS to make its old tests available to the public.

Finally, there was the race problem. Black students tended to score lower on the SAT than their white counterparts, and the gap proved persistent. But many universities, wanting in light of the civil rights movement to open themselves up to more black students, had to strike a balance between test results and the imperatives of diversity. ETS generally supported creativity in such measures, offering, rightly, that SATs should only be one of several criteria for university admission. And the company filed a friend-of-the-court brief defending affirmative action in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the landmark 1978 Supreme Court case that allowed certain kinds of racial preference in university admissions. But a painful side effect remained: The black-white test score gap ensured that two major liberal goals—equal opportunity for all, at least as judged on standardized tests, and racial equality “as a fact and as a result”—would seem to be in constant tension.

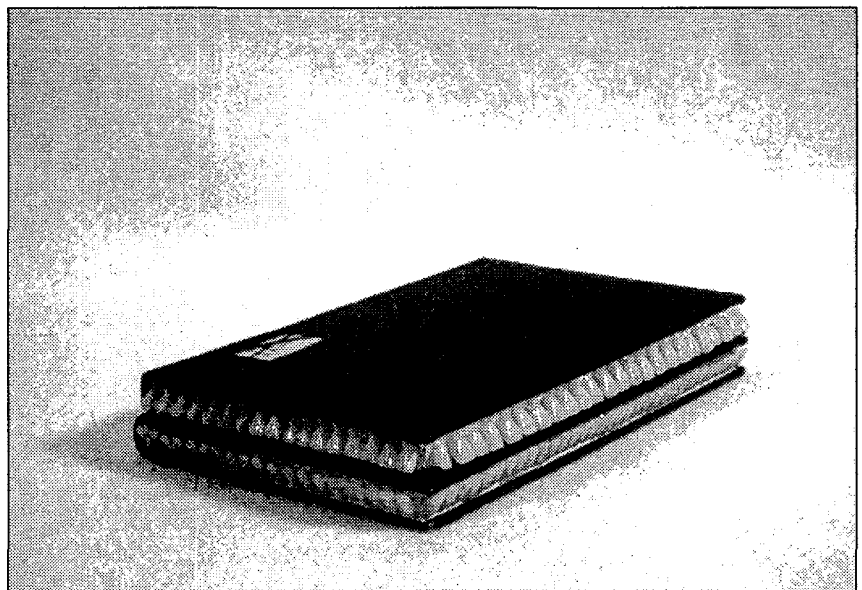
Lemann spends the last third of *The Big Test* dramatizing the long-term consequences of that tension through an extended, behind-the-scenes history of Proposition 209, the 1996 initiative that banned affirmative action in California. This is the least successful part of the book. Lemann narrates the story through the life and politics of a half-dozen products of the American meritocracy—middle-class kids who scored well on the SAT and graduated from elite universities—who eventually campaigned together against Proposition 209.

This choice of subjects is puzzling. As Lemann explains, Conant had been naïve on yet another point: Handed new opportunity, most products of the SAT meritocracy didn’t gravitate toward public service. Rather, they drifted into the professions—law, medicine, consulting firms. They never demanded that wealth turn over every generation, and happily shelled out big money so that their children could attend the best schools and take personalized SAT prep courses—and presumably hang onto their place in the new class structure. Yet for examples Lemann selects a half-dozen men and women who are acutely aware of their own privilege and drop

everything to fight the good fight in the affirmative action referendum. As a group, they seem to vindicate Conant’s faith in the new leaders after all.

A psychological portrait of the other side of that debate might have been revealing. Even relatively just social systems tend to mythologize themselves. The institutions of meritocracy pass along a message to those who play the game: Success and failure are strictly matters of merit and hard work; fortune and chance have little to do with it. But winners with nobody to thank but themselves can make for a disturbingly self-satisfied elite, a noblesse that feels no oblige. In his final chapter, Lemann makes a case for a “real meritocracy” based on the principles of the G.I. Bill rather than Conant’s Harvard: We should close the gap between our elite institutions and the rest of the system rather than merely squabble over a few slots at the top. That strikes me as an extremely sensible idea. Unfortunately, the fundamental questions of fairness, racial and otherwise, that Lemann raises in this book are likely to persist even then. ■

Jefferson Decker is managing editor of Boston Review.



*Grin* (books and plastic teeth) by Mark Arctander. From the exhibition **Bookish**, showing at the Chicago Cultural Center until Dec. 5.

# The Gods Must Be Crazy

By Eugene McCarraher

**W**endy Kaminer thinks I'm sick. We've never met, mind you, but I'm a Catholic, so I stand exposed, in the light of her new book, as an unstable menace to all things secular, democratic and rational. If I'm not vigilantly surveilled by the forces of reason, God (pardon the expression) knows what I'll do.

Of course, Kaminer sees hope for ticking time bombs like me. Remarking that

**Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials:  
The Rise of Irrationalism and  
Perils of Piety**

By Wendy Kaminer  
Pantheon Books  
278 pages, \$24

she would "treat religious cravings homeopathically," she commends my habits of prayer and ritual as ways to "compartmentalize" my beliefs and render them innocuous to myself and all those around me: "The cure is the disease, in small doses." Physician, heal thyself.

Therapy wouldn't be a new subject for Kaminer. In *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional* (1991) and *True Love Waits* (1996), Kaminer—a public policy fellow at Radcliffe and a contributor to *The Nation*, *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic Monthly*—emerged as a mordant critic of the therapeutic ethos, scourging the "dysfunctions," complexes and syndromes that hobble across the cultural landscape. If Christopher Lasch and Philip Rieff held up religion as the most effective antidote to therapeutic self-obsession, Kaminer diagnoses religion and "spirituality" in general as related forms of the malady, and recommends "reason" as the only reliable treatment.

Classifying the religious right, New Age movements, "codependency," recovery programs, tales of alien abduction, "junk science," cyber-euphoria and organized religion as elements in a larger pathology of irrationalism, Kaminer con-

tends that their cultural and political effects are insidious and potentially lethal. In her view, they cripple democracy and lame the capacity for sober, rational deliberation on our common affairs by upholding faith—"the elevation of individual testimony or sensation over logic and verifiable fact"—as the criterion of truth.

At a time when "inspirational" books sell more briskly than history, and when the statesmen-biologists of Kansas have repealed the laws of evolution, Kaminer's studies in the varieties of credulity at the turn of the millennium would appear to arrive none too soon. Unfortunately, by invoking the debunking spirit of H.L. Mencken, Kaminer lays claim to a venerable but wheezing tradition of *épater le booboisie*.

**M**uch of Kaminer's argument is indeed timely and indisputable. Her critique of digital culture captures the combination of "ersatz populism" and contempt for fleshly life that pervades the celebratory rhetoric of cyberboosters. To the extent that it envisions release from the limitations of nature and "eschews traditional notions of rationalism and linear thinking," the cyber-world undermines the sense of an intractable material world, impedes the ability to think and communicate coherently, and reinforces the therapeu-

tic elevation of feeling over intellect. Because they promote "speaking over thinking," Kaminer worries that interactive media herald not a new epoch of democracy but a "cacophony," a rule by the raucous.

In similar fashion, therapeutic followers and New Age votaries would rather emote than reason. Kaminer subjects the "recovery" movement to a withering empirical and polemical assault, denying claims of ubiquitous child molestation, satanic abuse, and "repressed memories" of everything from incest and bestiality to forced abortion and cannibalism. Concerned especially about the seepage of the recovery sensibility into feminism, Kaminer roundly admonishes therapeutic feminist fellow-travelers for their uncritical "deference to personal truths."

Kaminer is anything but deferential to the "spirituality bazaar" of New Age gurus and their devotees, upturning stalls that market *The Celestine Prophecy* and *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Deepak Chopra and Marianne Williamson. We meet a "trance channeler" possessed by an ancient Egyptian spirit (sounding "like a failing late-night comic"), and learn from the author of *Embraced by the Light* that victims of drunk drivers "may have chosen to die." Kaminer strains to be charitable, as she observes shrewdly that New Age represents an "utter den-

*Old Street,  
Kutahya, Turkey by  
Reha Akcakaya.  
From Temple:  
Black and White  
Reflections  
from Turkey, on  
exhibit at the  
A.R.C. Gallery in  
Chicago.*







igration of science coupled with an attempt to appropriate its credibility." She concedes that pop spirituality, while its stars are

as mercenary as any evangelical huckster, "expresses widespread misgivings about America's consumer culture." Still, for New Age acolytes, "intensity of personal belief is evidence of truth," and their devotions offer membership in a "besieged minority" that nonetheless "shines with moral vanity."

The political consequences of this retreat into irrationality are most evident to Kaminer in the religious right's attempt to bathe the public square in the light of its own moral vanity. Rehearsing familiar left-liberal arguments about the evils of sectarianism, Kaminer implies further that a secular politics informed by reliable scientific knowledge will issue in more clear-headed social policy. From gun control to the "war on drugs" (a campaign misconceived and lost, she rightly maintains, at its moralistic inception), public debate requires more "nonnormative analysis of social problems" and less pontification from scolds like William Bennett.

**A**nd yet, in her own unbelieving way, Kaminer can be every bit as tiresome as Bennett. In the final chapter on "the strenuous life" of turning a diversity of viewpoints into consensus (a word she uses without a hint of irony), we get the disillusioned-but-undaunted lecture, the one about the religious-who-seek-security and the godless-who-bravely-face-the-world. When Mencken or Bertrand Russell wrote this sort of thing, it still had the relish of damnation. Unfortunately for Kaminer, it's now a page in the book of sophomore commonplaces. It's a bad sign that when beckoning to the "freedom and opportunity for inventiveness offered by a godless world," she sounds more like Microsoft than Voltaire.

Where Mencken possessed bravado and wit commensurate to his sacrilege, Kaminer's impiety is disingenuous and untalented. She claims that her book is not an "attack upon organized religion, individual religious beliefs, or nonsectarian spiritual movements." Don't be

fooled: An impregnable smugness leavens her chapters; contempt for the faithful surfaces in stray phrases, as when Kaminer warns atheists against falling into moral absolutism, a pit "squirming with believers." Yet, amused and frightened at what rubes these mortals be, Kaminer can't seem to marshal the spleen for a well-turned curse. A line like "I'd expect God to write well and with some originality" is a puffball blasphemy, more cutesy than impious. As Luther said, if you're going to sin, sin vigorously.

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Kaminer's research about "believers" is as lazy as her heresy. If the notes are any indication, she never ventured out of Boston for any contact with the plebs. She doesn't seem to get around much in the greater Boston area, either. Ask adherents of any organized religion why their beliefs are more credible than those of Heaven's Gate, and they'll be "baffled," she smirks; "their beliefs are true." With Cornel West or the Harvard Divinity School within striking distance—and with Garry Wills and Stephen Carter as sources—that's the best answer Kaminer could get? Her glibness masks an appalling and even willful ignorance of the contemporary religious landscape.

As for "reason," her transparent and instrumental conception of rationality is belied by the history of science, which abounds in ideology draped in the argot of detachment. (Indeed, Kaminer herself notes that "junk science helped create the need for a feminist movement.") Moreover, as figures as disparate as Michel Foucault and Alasdair MacIntyre have maintained, "reason" does not exist outside of traditions of rationality, each with their differing histories, protocols and social locations.

**T**hat's why Kaminer's "reason" isn't at all "nonnormative." Insulated from the still largely religious values and democratic contentiousness of ordinary Americans, the non-moralistic social policy for which she longs would end up being the work of experts—for whom the imperatives of the state and the corporation are all too "normative." Might this suggest that the ideology of secularism, far from being an unambiguously liberating force, has been a vehicle for the translation of moral and political argument into expertise, and hence the transferral of cultural and political power to the professional-managerial class?

By the same token, "faith" isn't as simple and self-assured as Kaminer makes it. Her lack of interest in the "operation of reason within religious traditions" both obscures the traditioned character of reason itself and enables her to dump Deepak Chopra and Cornel West in the same vat of pabulum. Religions are historical traditions of rationality that evolve over time; their creeds, doctrines, codes and theologies reflect incessant, sophisticated and self-consciously imperfect reflection on the human condition. One could argue that the problem with religious discourse in the public square isn't its quantity—"too much" or "too little"—but its depressingly meager quality.

Not long ago, in these pages David Graeber called for a rekindling of the left's utopian impulse ("We Are All Utopians," Aug. 8). This is an "irrational" desire in the strictest sense, for the distance between our Kingdom of Customer Service and a more generous, egalitarian world cannot be measured by any rational scale. So in these dispiriting times—when being on the secular left must itself require enormous faith—the madness to struggle for a beloved land deserves cultivation, not treatment, and it requires religious hope that encompasses the most severe and most exalted visions of human possibility. If the left needs Rosa Luxemburg, it might need Dorothy Day even more. ■

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# Spender's Fortune

By Joe Knowles

I think continually of those who are truly great," begins the late Stephen Spender's most recognized poem. It could well be argued that there is no better epitaph for the man: No matter how hotly critics debated the merits of Spender's poetry, no one ever disputed the quality and reach of his rolodex.

**Stephen Spender:**  
***A Life in Modernism***  
By David Leeming  
Henry Holt  
304 pages, \$27.50

As an influential editor and famously charming cocktail companion, Spender regularly supped and swapped ideas with friends like Francis Bacon, Igor Stravinsky and T.S. Eliot. He also led a life characterized by both exuberant sexual dalliance and enduring marriage, set against an historical backdrop stretching from the battlefields of the Spanish Civil War to the campuses of 1968. So you might think that Spender's biography would make an interesting book—a unique blend of literary history, politics, love and good conversation.

Perhaps it will be someday—but David Leeming won't write it. Leeming's *Stephen Spender: A Life in Modernism* is remarkable in its inability to translate a life filled with so many fascinating faces and places into an engaging narrative. Nor does Leeming succeed, despite his academic training (he's a former professor of comparative literature), in providing a comprehensive assessment of Spender that puts his work in context and probes its insights. What we get instead are jarring insertions of weak half-analysis, at best regurgitating Spender's own ideas on modernism, politics and literature.

It turns out that Leeming's superior competitor, in both narrative momentum and critical authority, is his subject himself. In the main, *A Life in Modernism* is an awkward synthesis of Spender's own autobiography, journals and criticism. Better to go straight to the sources, which do a far better job of telling this intriguing story.

It begins at Oxford in the late '20s, when the gangly young poet met fellow undergraduate W.H. Auden, who was already gaining a reputation on campus for his eccentric demeanor and strikingly original verse. Soon enough, Auden introduced Spender to his friend Christopher Isherwood, a Cambridge dropout and budding novelist who occasionally visited from London. Thus was born a core of young friends conspiring "to create an entirely new literature," as Spender supposedly once put it.

But unlike other writerly circles of mutual admiration, this group pretty much succeeded in its aim to take over the world—at least for the next 10 years or so. By the early '30s, the trio were the talk of London, the promising stars of English literature. Spender made the rounds in Bloomsbury, and helped, for example, to get Isherwood's second novel, *The Memorial*, published by Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press. In 1933, championed by T.S. Eliot, Faber and Faber published Spender's debut, *Poems*, to immediate critical success. Meanwhile Auden, who noticeably influenced his peers, quickly was crowned the leader of this "new literature," whose other practitioners included fellow twentysomethings Louis MacNeice and Cecil Day-Lewis. Yet however innovative Auden's combination of concrete imagery, satire and psychoanalysis, this generation of modernists had not shaken and reinvented basic literary forms quite the way Ezra Pound and Eliot's had. (Indeed, Spender was more an old Romantic in modernist's clothing than anything else.)

What was really new about them was their political commitment. Auden, Isherwood and Spender were all quite queer, and accordingly had spent a lot of time in Weimar Germany, then the place for the rigorously practicing homosexual. But Germany's chaotic,

ultimately tragic politics also informed their work with an overt social awareness. This was particularly true for the journalistically minded Spender (whose father, incidentally, had been a liberal writer, some-time politician and biographer of Prime Minister David Lloyd George). As the ugly decade wore on, he wrote poems with titles like "Unemployed" and "An Elementary Classroom in a Slum," became a mainstay in the pages of the old *Left Review*, and frequently filed dispatches on the European situation for magazines like *The New Republic*. After the Spanish



Spender drawn by Henry Moore

Civil War broke out, Spender, Auden and Pablo Neruda circulated a petition among Europe's leading writers in support of the republic.

By this time, Spender, like most other intellectuals, had grown thoroughly disgusted with his government's official nonchalance toward fascism. A shadow lengthened over Europe, and old-fashioned liberals were unable or unwilling to do anything about it. Thus, Spender reasoned in the January 1937 tract *Forward from Liberalism*, extreme times called for an extreme counterbalance—communism. The British Communist Party secretary, Harry Pollitt, was sufficiently delighted that he offered





Spender party membership. Spender accepted, but declined an invitation to join up with the International Brigade in Spain. Despite his eagerness to see

Franco's rebellion put down, he could not quite overcome pacifist leanings; instead, he rendered his services as propagandist. He wasn't cut out to be a militant—George Orwell, in one of his more bigoted moments, labeled Spender and his cohort the “pink pansy left.”

The story of '30s intellectuals flirting with Communism is a familiar one, but Spender's is remarkable in how utterly swift his disillusionment was. Hardliners in the party were skeptical of his lingering doubts about Stalin's show trials, and remained unconvinced by an article he wrote for the *Daily Worker* announcing his Communist loyalty. For his part, Spender very quickly developed his own misgivings. In his autobiography, *World Within World*, he remembers the following incident, which occurred in Spain while on his first party errand:

In order to obtain my clearance to leave Barcelona I had to go to an office run by the British Communists. An officious man, tall and lean, with protruding ears, asked me my name. “Prove that you are Stephen Spender!” he said. I showed him my passport. On seeing this he gave a bitter laugh. “If you knew how many people come into this office and show passports!” ... Then I remembered the article I had written for the *Daily Worker*, where it had appeared with my photograph. When he had discovered the article in his file of *Daily Workers* even he could not pretend I was someone else. But I left wondering what happened to people who had no better evidence than passports with which to prove their identity.

After traveling throughout Republican Spain and making many friends there, Spender became more committed than ever to the anti-fascist cause. But he also quickly soured on Soviet methods, whose cruelty was being unmasked. Coming to share the anti-Stalinist feelings of republican warriors like André Malraux, his party membership barely lasted a month.

Meanwhile, his personal life had been going through spastic turmoil. The year before, he had left his lover Tony Hyndman and surprised the literary crowd by rather hastily marrying a young woman named Inez Pearn, a 22-year-old student of Spanish poetry active in the Republican cause. (Virginia Woolf especially disapproved of the union, describing Pearn as a “precise horse-headed woman” in her diary.) In any case, by 1939 the marriage fell apart, the Spanish experiment lay dead and Britain went to war. Spender wrote in his diary: “It so happens that the world has broken just at the moment when my own life has broken.”

The '30s were decisively over—and so too collapsed its literary era. Auden and Isherwood quit Europe altogether in favor of America, while the remaining writers became preoccupied with the war—or, as in Spender's case, personal subjects. This also entailed mellowing his ever-packed engagement calendar. “The writer's life should, in fact, be one of entering into external things and then withdrawing,” he later wrote. “Without entering in, he lacks experience of the world; and if he cannot withdraw, he is carried away.”

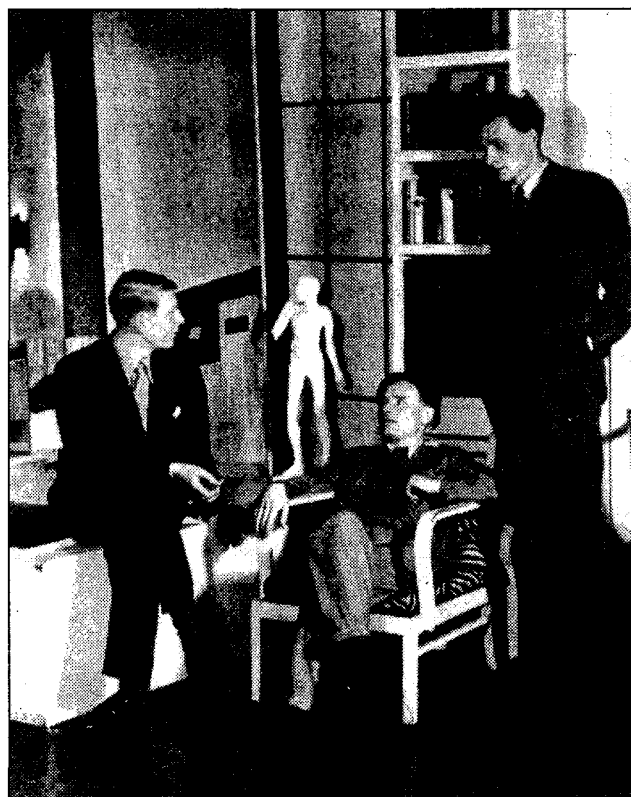
But soon enough, he was entering in again. After a surreal courtship during the Blitz, he married a concert pianist, Natasha Litvin—and stayed with her until his death a half-century later. (He is said to have also maintained various same-sex attachments throughout life; however, Leeming keeps this side of Spender's personality pretty well shrouded.) He got together with Cyril Connolly and launched *Horizon* magazine, instantly a hit project that lured top talent like Eliot as well as new voices like Dylan

**Left to right: Auden, Isherwood and Spender in the '30s.**

Thomas. He energetically helped develop yet another new literary culture, exerting more influence than he had before.

Yet Spender remains regarded as a '30s poet—and for no good reason, especially since much of what he wrote afterward was superior to the early material. He pulled off some brilliant stuff in the '30s—such as “Port Bou,” a meditation on a Republican training drill that ranks among the finest war poems ever composed. But more often than not, the early poems tended to range from exaggerated undergraduate sensitivity (“My parents kept me from children who were rough”) to decidedly nonpoetic sloganeering (“Oh young men oh young comrades”). Then there was his 1933 signature, “The Truly Great,” an anthem to artistic ambition. But it seems less a passionate cry against mediocrity than a yearning for recognition, worshipping those who “left the vivid air signed with their honour.” Anthologists have signed the vivid air for him, however, by repeatedly selecting this poem.

Connolly noted two sides to his friend. The first was “generous, gullible, affectionate, idealistic”; the second “shrewd, ambitious, aggressive and ruthless.” Spender himself made a major subject



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out of ambition, coming to more honest terms with it as he grew older. In the later poem "Public Son of a Public Man," we get the rather stark confession:

Before I could speak I had learned  
my lesson  
Better never to be born at all  
Than live in this world and fail to  
impress on  
Time, our name SPENDER in letters  
inch-tall.

This also happens to be one of his strongest poems. Indeed, the later Spender emerges as an outstanding autobiographical poet, eloquently recording family incidents ("Boy, Cat, Canary") and moments with dying friends ("Late Stravinsky Listening to Late Beethoven.")

But in the '50s, when the rigidly apolitical critical consensus harshly turned on Spender—and the '30s in general—his detractors were all too happy to seize on the younger poet's faults. It was unfair, not just because even a master like Auden had his fair share of whiffs, but because he was an easy target—still taking politics seriously when poets, according to the reigning school of killjoys at the University of Chicago, were only supposed to concern themselves with internal rippling nuances of irony. (As you can imagine, the '60s and '70s were kinder to him.) Spender was at heart a man of the world, continuing to write for the magazines; donating large amounts of time to PEN and the *Index on Censorship*; occasionally getting political in his verse; and editing the literary half of the Congress for Cultural Freedom's liberal, anti-Communist magazine *Encounter*. (Years after he left that publication, Spender and his close friend Isaiah Berlin, another *Encounter* regular, were horrified to learn that it had been secretly bankrolled by the CIA.) He lived out his days on a vigorous schedule of lecture tours, long lunches and writing, gradually becoming England's reigning literary old man. The small swan song *Dolphins* came out in 1994, and he died the next year.

Curiously, Leeming doesn't seem to notice, or care about, the voyage Spender's reputation has taken over

## The voyage Spender's reputation has taken says much about the changing interplay of culture and politics.

the years—certainly the protean critical reaction says much about the changing interplay of culture and politics. Nor does Leeming suggest how Spender's poetic voice, an unusual mix of old-fashioned journalism and Romanticism, might have affected the course of "modernist" thought.

But even if Leeming weren't going to break new critical ground, at the very least he could have attempted to tell those who care enough to read this book a few things they don't already know. Such was the case a few years back with *City Poet*, Brad Gooch's purposeless biography of Frank O'Hara,

which was delightful for its elegantly trashy gossip about the New York School of poets and painters. Gooch at least did some homework.

But Leeming, perhaps striving a bit too earnestly to secure a place for Spender in the 20th century pantheon, doesn't really go there. And where is his place, exactly? The '90s, like the '50s, have not been great for Spender's rep, at least in the United States, where, unbelievably, his *Collected Poems* have gone out of print. (Faber and Faber still does brisk business with Spender's volumes in Britain.) He was surely no Eliot, never having written anything so definitively awesome as *The Waste Land*. Ironically, probably the poet's most everlasting book is the nonfiction *World Within World*, still a classic of autobiography. (It is enduring enough to have been looted by David Leavitt for his 1993 novel *While England Sleeps*—the ultimate compliment.) But a poet only has to provide a glimpse of "the fire's centre" just once to join the club of "the truly great." Spender did that and more, many times. ■

## Wills Power

By Scott McLemee

The expression "public intellectual" should probably be retired. It now means little more than a Ph.D. with an agent. (The term "publicity intellectuals" would be more

When I mention his name, friends look surprised, even somewhat alarmed. It invariably turns out they are thinking of a certain bowtied Beltway blowhard, a man known for infusing the Republican Party platform with *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. But George Will isn't an intellectual, though he plays one on TV.

No, I hasten to explain, Garry Wills. Different guy altogether. Trained as a classicist, Wills has published studies of ancient Rome and Saint Augustine and Shakespeare. He also writes a newspaper column, and has turned out essays on a diverse enough range of subjects to constitute a small encyclopedia. He resembles a talk show pundit about as much as lightning does a lightning bug.

Garry Wills started his journalistic career by writing for *National Review*. (That's the only other thing he shares with the pseudo-professorial nitwit,

### A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government

By Garry Wills  
Simon & Schuster  
352 pages, \$25

fitting.) There are, of course, a few writers who really do answer the original job description: people who bring the tools of critical thought, namely precise knowledge and carefully worked out concepts, into the common discourse. One I particularly admire is Garry Wills. But this admiration has made for an awkward moment or two over the years.





besides several letters of his name.) But as the '60s wore on, he found himself at odds with his former cothinkers in the right-wing

crusade. The touchstone issues were the civil rights movement (Wills supported it) and the Vietnam War (he wanted the United States out).

This break was a drawn-out affair; he did not simply shed the ideology, but underwent a painstaking effort to rethink things. The result was *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (1970), a remarkable and very annoying book—huge, learned, extremely insightful and just about impossible to read. The effort to understand the political biography of our most Shakespearean chief executive carried Wills into the deepest thickets of American political culture. He treated Nixon as the consummate product of the liberal tradition in American politics.

Here, Wills used "liberal" in its more traditional sense, as naming the ideology of the marketplace and of self-fashioning. As if that didn't invite confusion enough, Wills pursued his own meandering trip across the cultural landscape of Nixon's America without ending up on either the "right" or "left." His memoir *Confessions of a Conservative* (1979) is a fascinating account of his excommunication from the right. But to grasp all the nuances of his break, the reader must work through 50 pages on Saint Augustine's *The City of God*.

Now, a neatly ordered set of ideological presuppositions makes for a great savings of mental energy. Facts and ideas just snap into place. And that is just what you can expect when a recognized "public intellectual" takes the podium: a more or less well-made argument, in defense of some well-defined position on the hot political or cultural topics of the moment. This has its uses, of course—not least for busy media people, who know which talking heads to book for each of the (exactly) two sides of any given argument.

In that sense then, Garry Wills is not a public intellectual after all—for at this late stage, the term suggests little more than a willingness to channel the flow

of one's ideas to the needs of the publicity machine. He is an accessible writer, much if not all of the time. He has published at least 10 other volumes on American politics and culture. Even his big weird Nixon book is worth revisiting from time to time. "Any approach to

blooded forms of individualism pervading the culture are a fairly recent innovation. Wills has also written a couple of books about the mythological characters who play the biggest roles in shaping this dog-eat-dog ideology: John Wayne and Ronald Reagan.

**Garry Wills, a rare public intellectual, has written on a diverse enough range of subjects to constitute a small encyclopedia.**



power which is primarily therapeutic tends to get separated from the realities of power and concentrated on the feeling of power," he writes on page 459, "something much more easily created as an illusion than supplied as a reality." (The whole of '90s multiculti leftism, diagnosed in one sentence!)

**W**ills is concerned with issues on the public mind. Yet he is better at exploring them than at providing snappy answers. A case in point is *A Necessary Evil*—his new book chronicling and interrogating the perennial American distrust of government. For some while now, Wills has been arguing for an historical understanding of American civic life sharply at odds with most contemporary political assumptions, leftist and rightist alike. This project began with *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (1978); in subsequent books he has pursued his thinking through analyses of the Federalist Papers, the iconography of George Washington, and the Gettysburg Address. To simplify drastically: Wills sees the core values of American citizenship as resting, not on market liberalism, but on a more communitarian spirit; the most cold-

With *A Necessary Evil*, Wills suggests that the spirit of the Duke and the Gipper has penetrated to the very core of how we see ourselves. The anti-governmental outlook has grown so commonplace as to have become something like the national common sense.

We the People (goes this mentality) have formed an imperfect union of the disgruntled and the mutually suspicious. But there is one thing we share: We are ever prone to assuming the worst of our government—sometimes for very good reason, of course, but also from force of habit. This disposition has very deep roots. It was certainly evident in the American Revolution. The War of Independence was fought by local militias, made up of volunteers who took their hunting rifles down from the mantle to fight taxation without representation. Afterward, the Founding Fathers worried that, even with representation, any strong government would tend to become a tyranny. They felt a healthy disdain for professional politicians, long-term officeholders and bureaucrats. They did not want power and authority to be any more centralized than necessary. As much as possible, government should be local, and therefore close to the people, keeping it responsive and manageable.

The democratic ideal, then, would be found in the New England town meetings of 200 years ago—where citizens (meaning white guys and them only, but let's not get into that now) could have their say on the issues of the day. Insofar as a national government was required, it was a necessary evil. To put limits on its power—and so to curb any tendency to usurp the rights of the states—the Constitution was designed with a set of checks and balances among the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The framers also made sure that individuals would be able to “keep and bear arms,” as the Bill of Rights puts it. That way Americans would always be able to defend themselves against despotism—including that of their own government, in the worst-case scenario.

*A Necessary Evil* challenges these ideas, point by historical point. The revolutionary militias were not terribly efficient fighting units. (For one thing, the average colonist didn't own a gun, and if he did it was not a precision weapon.) Participatory democracy in the town meetings tended to be undermined by the sheer unwieldiness of the gatherings. Examination of the Constitutional debates and the Federalist Papers reveals that an efficient central government with sovereignty over the states was no accident. And as for what one writer in the law journals has called “the insurrectionary theory of the Second Amendment”—well, you can certainly prove that the Bill of Rights was drawn up to authorize paramilitary squads, provided you ignore as much history as possible.

If it merely debunked various legends, *A Necessary Evil* would be a useful enough book. (The prospect of Wills debating Charlton Heston has a certain appeal—like watching a blood sport.) But in fact the author pursues a more complex line of thought. He does not deny that hostility, suspicion and outright indifference have been persistent strains in the American response to government. A good part of the book is devoted to chronicling specific challenges

to state policy and authority in the United States—from Shays Rebellion, through Confederate secession, down to contemporary abortion-clinic bombings.

Sifting through this historical record, Wills defines a number of types or strategies of anti-government behavior: defiance, withdrawal, civil disobedience, etc. He finds certain common values turning up, no matter what species the ideology or action. These values hold that the good things in social life can be defined as local, communal, spontaneous, traditional and participatory. None of which, alas, the national government is ever likely to be. The anti-government mentality assumes that any increase in central power necessarily will be at the cost of these values. “At times, these values uphold liberal positions, at times conservative ones,” Wills writes. “But wherever they show up, they bring up all or more of their fellows. They can be found in a hippie commune or a modern militia camp. These are all good American values, and it is no wonder people want to uphold them.”

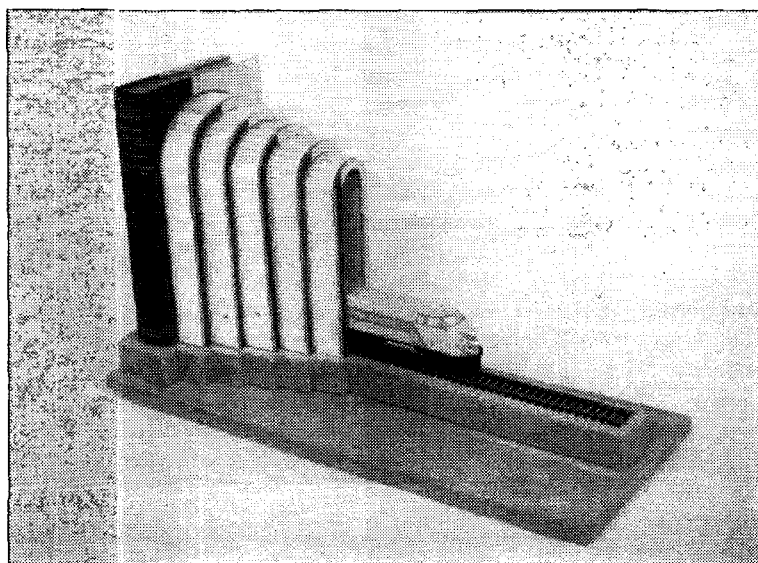
But the calculus of power and justice is a little more complicated than that. The “intrusive” nature of governmental power is not purely destructive; it has even, on occasion, been the absolute prerequisite for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The centralized authority of a government imposes its

own values—some of them pretty alienating, like minute attention to details of regulations, formal procedure and professional standards of judgment. Then again, lynching is a perfect expression of spontaneity, local participation, and populist *joie de vivre* (but not for the SOB at the end of the rope).

It is, in a way, rather sad that Wills had to write *A Necessary Evil*. A very intelligent man devotes an entire book to argue that, after all, the national government probably *could* do things to enhance the quality of public life—but that we are too prone to suspicion to permit this. “When government does not show all the human virtues,” Wills writes, “it is rejected as contributing to none of them. That asks too much of government, as a preliminary to expecting nothing of it.”

Wills reviews the history and philosophy behind this attitude. He lovingly unpacks the wording of the Constitution—and of Martin Luther King's letter from the Birmingham jail, which for Wills is anything but a document embodying anti-governmentalism (though King needed no lessons on the injustice of power). The author thinks about our civic life without producing sound-bitten mini-ideas. He resists the cultural status quo—without adopting the usual faux rebellious posture. He does, that is, what public intellectuals should do. And would do. If we had any. ■

*Tunnel Vision* by Margaret Wharton. From the exhibition **Bookish**, showing at the Chicago Cultural Center until Dec. 5.







# Congolese Days

By Carl Bromley

**R**onan Bennett's novels, screenplays and essays—few of which have been seen here—about Northern Ireland's troubles have been a spirited counterblast against the received wisdom that molds the way Northern Ireland has been portrayed in Britain's media. Bennett's masterly TV play *Love Lies Bleeding* signified the end

**The Catastrophist**  
By Ronan Bennett  
Simon & Schuster  
336 pages, \$24

of the road for the writers who had besieged Britons for nearly 30 years with dozy *Romeo and Juliet* scenarios of Catholic girls falling in love with Protestant boys and, well, you can guess the rest, can't you?

Bennett writes slow-burning, profoundly psychological thrillers, whose protagonists usually have pasts scarred by political violence. Though they still touch on Ireland, his novels have grown in ambition and geographic scope. *The Catastrophist* is set in the Belgian Congo during its last colonial gasp, where, under the brilliant and charismatic leadership of Patrice Lumumba, the independence movement is beginning to frighten both the white colonists and the United States, who fear that the resource-rich Congo might fall under Soviet influence.

James Gillespie, the novel's narrator, is nominally covering the Congo for the *London Observer*, but really following his beautiful and bewitching Italian girlfriend, Inès Sabiani, who is a reporter for Italy's Communist daily, *L'Unita*. Since they first became lovers two years earlier, he has been troubled by the thought that her love for him could easily be eclipsed by her political passions.

The gulf between them is exposed at an outdoor drinks party the two attend. Bennett depicts with ironic relish the insularity and conceit of the colony's

white rulers, who ridicule the anti-colonial struggle raging beyond their compound; blacks are routinely described as *macaques* (monkeys). When, from the party's secure vantage, they see the military kill unarmed civilians, they show few traces of emotion, continuing to water ski and play tennis or croquet. While Gillespie is appalled by such decadence, Inès is politically enraged. At that moment, he realizes, "She no longer loves me, not the way she once did. ... I am now replaced by other things."

Their estrangement grows along with the anti-colonial struggle. As a journalist (and as a person) Gillespie claims to be an "ever-evasive presence ... not truly part of this." Inès, however, is not a "trained observer" in Gillespie's mode, but passionate about what she sees. Much to his irritation, she does not carry a reporter's notebook or attend official press briefings; instead, she rummages among ordinary people, immerses

**A journalist covers the Belgian Congo during its last colonial gasp and becomes embroiled in love and politics.**

herself in the anti-colonial struggle and becomes a confidante of Lumumba.

Stipe, a supple, sneaky CIA man, whose most sinister quality is his ability to make friends, fills the vacuum that Inès has left in Gillespie's life. A brilliant manipulator, he lures Gillespie into friendship, feeding him sympathy, secrets and the story that seals Gillespie's professional reputation: the bombshell that the Belgians are secretly planning to capitulate to the independence movement because the colony has become a huge financial liability.

Inès realizes that Stipe is attempting to knock the wind out of the independence movement's sails with this news and contain it according to America's Cold War foreign policy objectives. It takes time, however, for Gillespie to realize his cherished journalistic distance has been compromised by Stipe's overtures: "I'd been a proxy floating something speculative and provocative ... Stipe's picture."

**T**he *Catastrophist* is not another novel that uses an exotic and chaotic background to tell a love story. Neither does it play on liberal pity; Bennett has a moral and political intelligence that transcends orthodoxy. He shows how colonialism, with its subtle and overt violence, marks the bodies and language of the colonized; how its quietly "post-colonial" cousin, America, is just as terrifying. When Stipe loses influence over Lumumba, he turns to disaffected ranks among the Congo's military brass—and helps plan the *coup d'état* that ultimately secured the Congo's fate as Mobutu's 30-year kleptocracy.

Gillespie is plagued by many of the dilemmas Bennett's other characters have confronted, like the nature and worth of political commitment, and its intersection with personal needs. It's probably something Bennett has confronted himself. His politics have resulted in two prison sentences (both quashed on appeal) and his exclusion as a "security risk" from the British Parliament, where he was a research assistant for a left-wing MP.

But Bennett's enviable accomplishments remind us of the importance of political conviction in literature: The mediocrity of much of the drama written about Northern Ireland's troubles was the result of many of the finest literary talents shunning the conflict. Some found the conflict too parochial and tribal; others feared the atmosphere of political intimidation and censorship. The irony is that as much as they despised the "leprosy of politics" (to use a phrase of Gillespie's), they, like our narrator, became the unwitting accomplices of the status quo. ■

**Carl Bromley** has written about politics and film for *Cineaste*, *Counterpunch* and *The Nation*.

# Garbage Recollection

By Phyllis Eckhaus

**P**ity the poor 19th century Americans possessed of a keen sense of smell. Homes were pungent with chamber pots; farm kitchens were odorous with huge hogsheads for refuse and sour milk swarming with flies; city streets were "perfect avenues of swill," redolent

**Waste and Want:  
A Social History of Trash**  
By Susan Strasser  
Metropolitan Books  
355 pages, \$27.50

with tons of manure deposited daily by horses and livestock. Contemporary housekeeping experts advised using garlic as a cement and urine as a cleanser; they suggested that spoiled poultry be salvaged with charcoal and rancid lard sweetened with potatoes. One wonders if early Americans developed some sub-conscious capacity to sort through smells and dismiss the ordinary stench of daily life as a kind of background noise.

Whether or not early Americans smelled differently, they certainly thought differently. *Waste and Want*, Susan Strasser's fascinating look at "trashmaking as a social process," is a history of consciousness. Strasser demonstrates how Americans have, through two scant centuries, dramatically redefined "waste" and their relationship to it.

Those goods not directly reusable by the consumer could be reused by industry, which relied on recycling to provide the materials for production. Processed goods were valued for their components, not their history: Mid-19th century paper mills imported mummies from Egypt so they could use the linen wrappings for production; in 1857, the Bank of the United States sold, for recycling, 10 tons of autographed letters by leading statesmen and politicians.

As the country's manufacturing capacity grew, so did the appetite for goods. Nineteenth century peddlers promoted traditional values as they simultaneously acclimated housewives to a fledgling consumer culture: On the

one hand, peddlers promoted thrift and conservation through their barter of tinware for farm produce, rags, bones and old metal goods; on the other hand, they introduced households to the sales pitch and the regular acquisition of new things. Itinerant Yankees or Jews, they brought excitement to the isolated routine of rural life; reputed to cheat the farmers and trouble the daughters, they seduced their customers into consumer consciousness. By the late 1800s, when new technology made the mass production of tinware possible, housewives were already primed to purchase goods and thus receptive to the new mail order businesses of Sears and Montgomery Ward. Peddlers became obsolete.

**H**ousewives' relationship to their trash changed. With mass production and new technology, household trash lost value. The production of paper from wood pulp, introduced in 1867, reduced the value of rags. Meatpackers Swift and Armour not only flooded the market for bones and offal, they pioneered new uses for meat by-products. Scavenging—once an accepted enterprise for poor youth—became an occupation for entire impoverished families. Household debris became associated with dirt and the lower classes.

Cities finally tackled refuse. In New York City in 1896, the sanitation commission mandated that households sort their trash into separate receptacles for organic garbage, ashes and rubbish; the organic material was sold as animal feed, the ashes used as landfill. Other cities also instituted

*With mass  
production and new  
technology, house-  
hold trash lost value.*

some form of separation. In 1902, four-fifths of all cities with more than 25,000 people required households to sort their garbage. Keeping organic matter fit for pigs was a special civic concern; as one government pamphlet asserted, "Surely very few phonograph needles would find their way into the garbage pail, if the householder could imagine the tortures suffered by the unfortunate animal."

Municipal garbage collection coincided with the development of disposable products. Cheap paper, concerns about hygiene and a budding consumer culture created a market for toilet paper. One of the first popular disposable products, toilet tissue was widespread by the turn of the century, replacing mail order catalogues and other printed papers alleged by tissue manufacturers to be "a direct cause of Hemorrhoids." Toilet paper was followed by paper towels and paper cups. While some paper cups were designed for multiple use, the makers of the Health Kup boasted that its design made reuse especially difficult; the Health Kup triumphed to become the Dixie Cup we know today.

By the '20s, American women were prepared to accept the next great disposable product: sanitary napkins, made with cellucotton left over from World War I bandages. Ad man Albert Lasker courted Kotex, declaring, "The products that I like to advertise most are those that are only







used once!" Strasser describes women's ultimate welcome of the product as a well-timed marvel of cultural synergy. Changing attitudes

about waste, hygiene and women's roles suddenly made it possible to appreciate sanitary napkins: "They were clean, they saved time, and they made it easier to be out in the world."

Strasser highlights this example as a distinct demonstration of how sharply women's consciousness of waste had altered. Modern notions of waste, redefined to emphasize squandered time, became "strikingly silent on the subject of wasting materials." Saving time become paramount, regardless of environmental consequences.

The author of a previous book on mass marketing, Strasser pays close attention to Madison Avenue's influence. Christine Frederick, a self-proclaimed household engineer and fervent advocate of disposable products, counseled manufacturers on "Selling Mrs. Consumer," the title of her 1929 book. She and her husband

proudly coined the term "progressive obsolescence," which they defined as an admirable state of mind characterized by consumer willingness to scrap still-useful goods and spend large amounts of money on the newest products. Companies like General Motors took this concept to heart, each year introducing a more fashionable product. Given their cost, cars were the "ultimate test case" for planned obso-

**Given their cost,  
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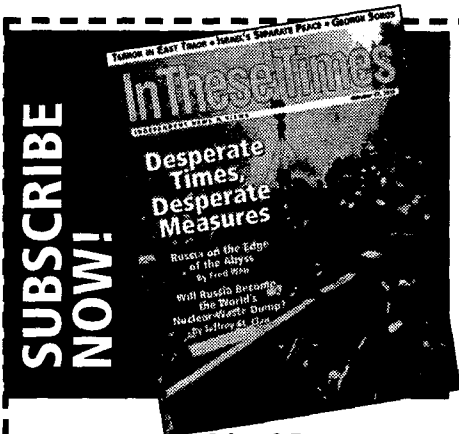
lescence—and planned obsolescence won. GM's Chevrolet vanquished Ford's unchanging Model T, compelling a once-resistant Henry Ford to start introducing annual style changes.

Lacking products to hawk during World War II, Madison Avenue promoted salvage drives. Slogans like "Get in

the Scrap!" and "Let's Junk the Jap!" persuaded Americans to contribute materials that often moldered in conspicuous piles while the government figured out what to do with them. The War Advertising Council, perhaps swept up in its own propaganda, created effective campaigns only tenuously related to wartime needs. Strasser sees this episode as confirmation that consumers can be motivated to mend their wasteful ways; one can also read it as evidence that Americans are easily sold a bill of goods.

Strasser concludes with a faint hope that recycling will show us the way to salvation, so to speak. Yet as her book strongly suggests, Americans may have lost the capacity to recognize unbridled consumption as waste. Thus the *New York Times*' John Tierney can characterize consumption as the key to national prosperity, and earnestly declare recycling "the most wasteful activity in America: a waste of time and money, a waste of human and natural resources." Tierney's attitude is the end product of consumption's hold on America, virtually guaranteeing that the trash in the landfills will continue to mount. ■

Phyllis Eckhaus is a writer in New York.



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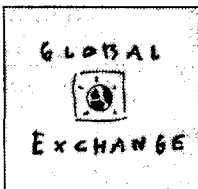
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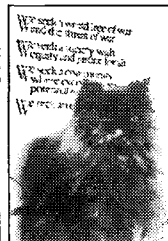
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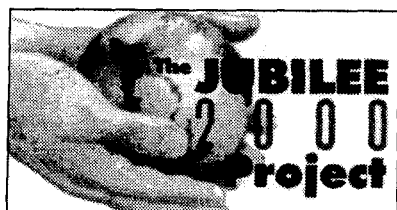
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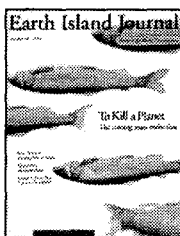


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authoritative commentary on an unholy alliance  
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laying there, about the slashes, the knife wounds, about his hereditary medical condition, did I know where his parents were, did I have any information at all besides the fact that he was the love of my life?

**M**eanwhile, back at the ranch where the author was getting screamed at by the mother for ACCIDENTALLY bashing IDIOT SISTER JULIE on the head with the nail polish remover, AN ACCIDENT, the author was sitting very still on a ripped kitchen chair and staring at the chunks of crud on the floor. The mother is what they call a main character. The mother is a very main character who says I live to torment her, that I only wailed the Cutex Nail Polish Remover bottle at the head of Julie because I want to torment her, who says the reason I do anything is just to torment her.

Now you need to know the scenery. First the house. The address. 1619 East Crawford. A rental in a row of rentals all the same, all very hideous on a dead-end road between Black Cat Lumber and the illegal dumping ravine. People have been heaving off mattresses and old stoves and dead dogs ever since I can remember even though there is a huge nailed-up sign that says NO DUMPING! VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED! But in all the time of our living here I have never seen anyone get prosecuted once. I don't think a prosecutor even exists.

In the garbage ravine there is a nude man who crouches among the trash piles and his name is Old Red and he has very yellow skin like freezer-burned chicken and his thing in life is to suddenly run out and do a two-second display of his dinger and then run back in. People say he is actually a businessman, an executive at Boeing, very high up. I have never seen Old Red, but I believe in him. There have been nights when I have heard the drifting sound of his lonely yodels.

Our house slants. Like if you lay a jar on the floor of the kitchen area it will start rolling very rapidly. The back of the house is shoved tight into the dirt of the hill and the front is on sinking wooden legs and there are scabby gray streaks all over the beige paint and wet chunks of mold growing all over the roof and there is a broken TV antenna that turns in the wind and makes noises that will freak the bravest person out.

There are a lot of trees behind the house, mostly scrub maple and pine and a lot of nasty smells that come from the garbage ravine and more nasty smells that come from the mud in front of the house and all day there is the sound of the loudspeaker calling in the lumberyard for Mike. Mike to the front desk. Mike,

you got a call on line three. Mike to the loading dock. And I have watched out my window to see which one is Mike, which one of the men on the forklifts inserting the smashed-flat Dracula teeth under stacked loads of wood is Mike, but every time they call for Mike a different guy goes inside. Maybe they are all Mike.

In our backyard is a rusted-out oil barrel hooked to the house and a T-pole clothesline with a hole in the metal of the T-pole called a weep-hole. It is there for drainage and ventilation but it also sometimes catches the wind and makes a sad "hoooooooo-hooooooooo," sound, very lonely. And there is also the "hoooooooo-hooooooooo" of the trains passing on the other side of the hill, and once when I was just standing in the backyard I heard the T-pole and the train hoooooooo-hooooooooo at the same time and my eyes went instantly wet, for what reason I do not know.

There is no sidewalk on our road.

Just mud and mud and mud. The mother says there is something wrong with the ground. It bubbles. Julie says a shrunken man inhabits the mud and she has seen his face rise to the surface and she has seen the whites of his eyeballs opening at her, she has seen his muddy lips and freaky teeth and he tries to speak to her but she always runs inside before he can deliver his message. Julie is not the kind of person who makes things up and she swears it is true about the shrunken man.

I said, "Julie, you are lying."

She said, "Roberta, I am not."

"I said, 'If you are telling the truth then poke this pin into your hand.'"

Julie shoved it in all the way to its head. That is her style. And so I have been freaking on the possibility of the existence of the rising shrunken man because the way Julie did that pin thing was so sincere.

**T**he author could see Julie sitting at the top of the stairs and smiling because she was happy the mother was screaming at the author. Julie was almost laughing at the scene because JULIE IS EVIL, SHE IS AN EVIL PERSON.

The author was sitting very still in a blue-flowered Sears nightgown with one rip under the arm caused by the author insisting on sitting with her knees up and the nightgown pulled tight over her knees which she knows causes rips but she does it anyway because she has NO RESPECT no GRATITUDE because she thinks THE WORLD REVOLVES AROUND HER plus she is a stupid, stupid idiot because she is barefooted, what if she stepped on a needle, one of the mother's dropped embroidery needles? What if she stepped on



a needle and it went right into her foot and Roberta would not feel it and the needle would rise and rise and rise through the veins leading up to the heart and then the needle would STAB HER IN THE HEART and Roberta would DIE and it would be VERY PAINFUL, this according to the nurse mother, a medical expert on Freaky Ways to Croak. It was the mother who stole the *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* Golden Jubilee Edition even though it had HOSPITAL PROPERTY DO NOT REMOVE stamped all over it in red. A book the author has fallen in love with and reads at night during the lonely hours.

The mother shouted that she knew several people who died from the Rising Stab of the Unfelt Needle, or RSUN, she has seen cases of it many times and not ONE PERSON HAS SURVIVED IT.

And the author sat very still but she was thinking AS IF!!! As if I wouldn't feel a needle go into my own foot. As if I don't have enough vein biology information to know a needle would never make it to my heart. AS IF! AS IF! AS IF!

But Roberta kept her mouth shut and her eyes on the floor where she continued her study of the chunks of crud. She did not make a peep while the mother blorked out her fake medical information in horrible breath explosions.

The author has a very sensitive nose.

Once in the olden days of Roberta's life there was a dog named Cookie. And the mother was also always screaming at Cookie for everything, smoking and screaming because Cookie had incurable skin problems caused by the mange creature Demodex and Cookie was always itching and scratching and all her hair was rotting off and wet scary dog scalp was showing and the sound of the chewing got on the nerves of the mother who threw things at the dog and shouted, "YOU AGGRAVATE ME!" And then the mother said Cookie had to go and Roberta begged and begged her no but all the mother did was wait until Roberta went to school and when she came home there was no Cookie. Instead there was a bag of white-chocolate stars from the famous candy place beside the Aurora Bridge. The famous dumping and jumping bridge. And the mother had bite marks on her hand and she said to Roberta, "Have a candy star."

I said, "Where's Cookie?"

She said, "I have no idea."

And Roberta stood on the porch and called and called until the mother yanked her inside and shouted, "You want to call that dog? Here! You call her!" And she grabbed the telephone and bashed the receiver into Roberta's face. A broken nose. A boxer's nose. One of my many distinctive features. My sense of smell has been very sensitive ever since.

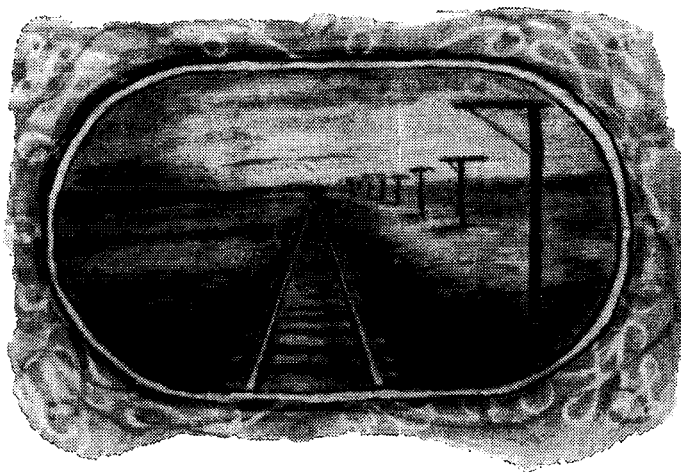
I have not mentioned yet the real mystery of this story. The gruesome and bloody scene in a parking lot on the edge of the restricted area of the Nevada desert known as Dreamland. A real place. The Lucky Chief Motel Massacre. Only two known survivors. One was Cookie and the other one was me. Maybe you saw pictures in your newspaper. It was very famous. But I am jumping ahead. Because I have not even mentioned the father yet.

Julie got a major lump on her head from the nail polish remover bottle and the mother made her come downstairs so I could feel it and know the terribleness of my personality and maybe it was cold-blooded of me to press down on it as hard as I could but there is such a thing as hatred in this world. The hippies are trying to cure it but I do not think they will be able to. No hippie could make me say peace to my sister right now, who is laying on the bed faking being asleep. She is doing her imitation sleep formations like hanging her mouth part open and breathing long breaths and slightly rolling her eyeballs under her eyelids and I will say she looks very convincing. Julie is an idiot and I hate her but she is very talented at certain things. Faking things.

I do feel slightly bad about bashing her head so hard. I feel slightly bad about so many things I have done. But I do not feel bad about killing him. Because it was me who killed him. And I'm not asking any forgiveness for that at all. It was a good idea and I'm glad I had it.

Truth plus Magical Love equals Freedom. The author knows this is a lot of details to remember for your reading comprehension but the author badly wants to give you the who, what, when, where, and how of this story right away because the author very badly wants to get to the question of why. The burning question of why she turned out the way she did and why she ended the way she ended.

Ask a burning question, get a burning answer. ♦



Lynda Barry is the creator of Ernie Pook's Comeek and the author of the novel and play *The Good Times Are Killing Me*. This story is excerpted from *Cruddy*, her second novel, recently published by Simon and Schuster.



# Cruddy

Story and Illustrations  
by Lynda Barry



Once upon a cruddy time on a cruddy street on the side of a cruddy hill in the cruddiest part of a crudded-out town in a cruddy state, country, world, solar system, universe. Once upon a cruddy time behind cruddy Black Cat Lumber on a very cruddy mud road which bubbles up very weird smells that evil genie themselves up through the cruddy dark rain and into the yellow lit-up window of the cruddy top bedroom of a cruddy rental house where a cruddy girl is sitting on a cruddy bed across from her cruddy sister who I WILL KILL YOU IF YOU TOUCH THIS, JULIE, AND IF YOU DO I SWEAR TO GOD I WILL KILL YOU, NO MERCY, NO TAKE-BACKS PRIVATE PROPERTY, THIS MEANS YOU, JULIE, YOU! The cruddy girl named Roberta was writing the cruddy book of her cruddy life and the name of the book was called Cruddy.

Cruddy by the author Roberta Rohbeson, who is grounded until September 8, 1972. Only eleven months and five more days to go.

Cruddy. The famous book by the famous author Roberta Rohbeson who can't even CONCENTRATE TO WRITE this because her little sister will NOT shut up she will NOT shut up SHE WILL NOT SHUT UP and Roberta is about to BASH her little sister's HEAD IN IF SHE DOES NOT SHUT UP AND—

Now it is later.

Now Roberta is back from just getting in huge trouble for throwing the Cutex Nail Polish Remover bottle at her sister. Roberta was aiming at her sister's ARM but it wailed on the sister's HEAD by accident. Roberta was trying to explain to the mother it was an ACCIDENT! AN ACCIDENT! But the mother never believes anything Roberta says anymore since the night the mother got called to the emergency room where the author was tripping out on drugs very badly and the mother started screaming, "DRUGS?!! DRUGS?!! DRUGS?!!" and the cords on her neck were sticking out extremely and she had to be restrained



by others to keep from killing the author, and the police kept sticking their freaky heads in close to the author's face and their breath was quite squidly and they kept saying, "Where did you get the substance, Roberta, who gave you the substance, Roberta, where did you get it, the substance, Roberta?"

And in the next cubicle the restrained and tripping Vicky Talluso was screaming, "DON'T YOU NARC ME OUT, ROBERTA! IF YOU NARC ME OUT I SWEAR TO GOD I WILL KILL YOU!"

But the author didn't want to narc anyone out. All she wanted to do was deliver the fantastic message of Truth plus Magical Love equals Freedom, but this was obviously a message the police and the mother could not comprehend.

And rushed to the operating room was the Love Interest, also tripping violently and hemorrhaging internally, and it was not looking good for the Love Interest, and the police were asking me if I had any information, did I know how he fell, how long he was

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